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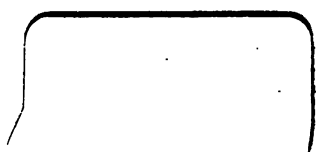


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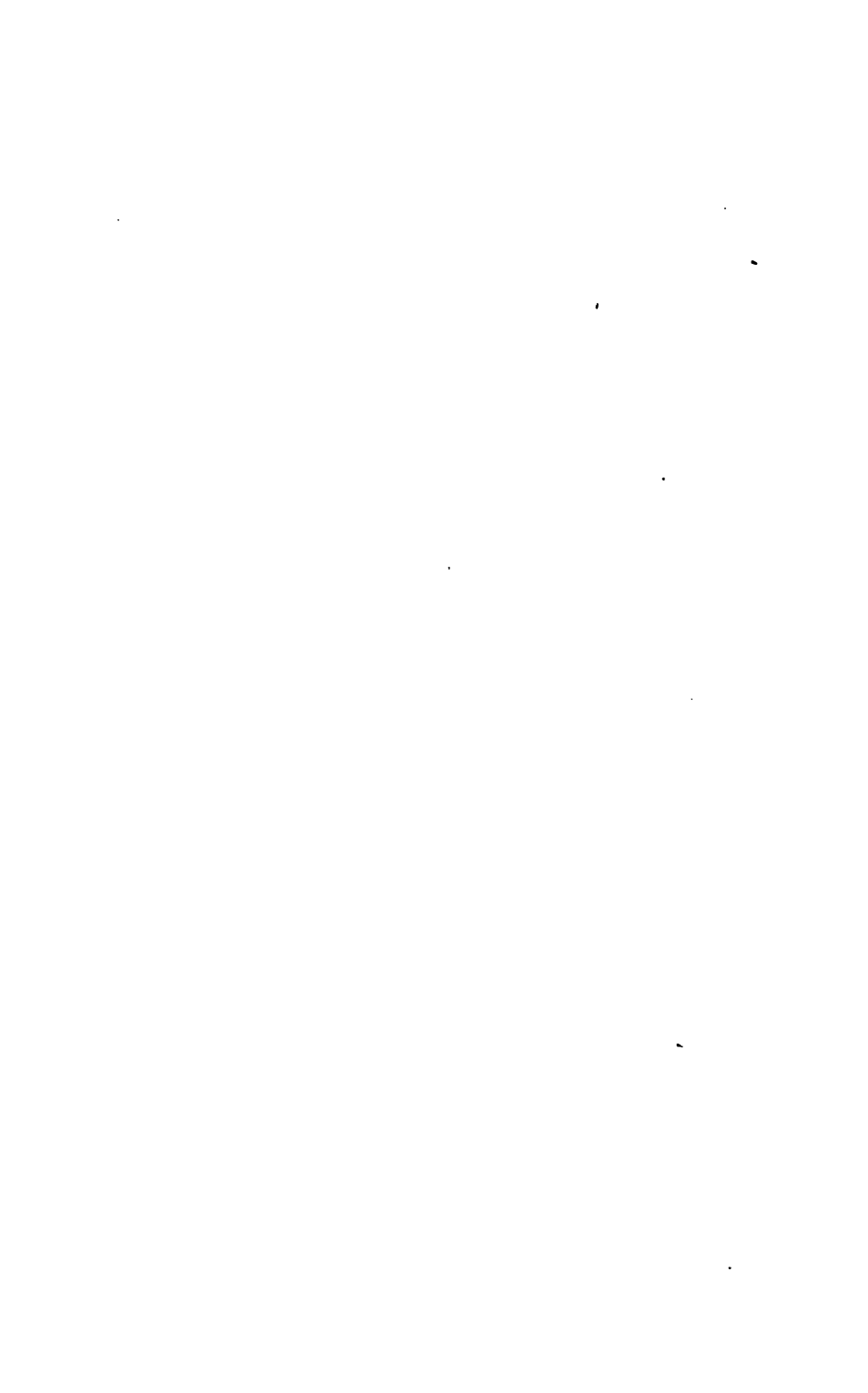
# RED FRIDAY



TEACH YOUR CHILDREN



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**RED FRIDAY**





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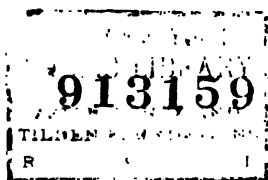
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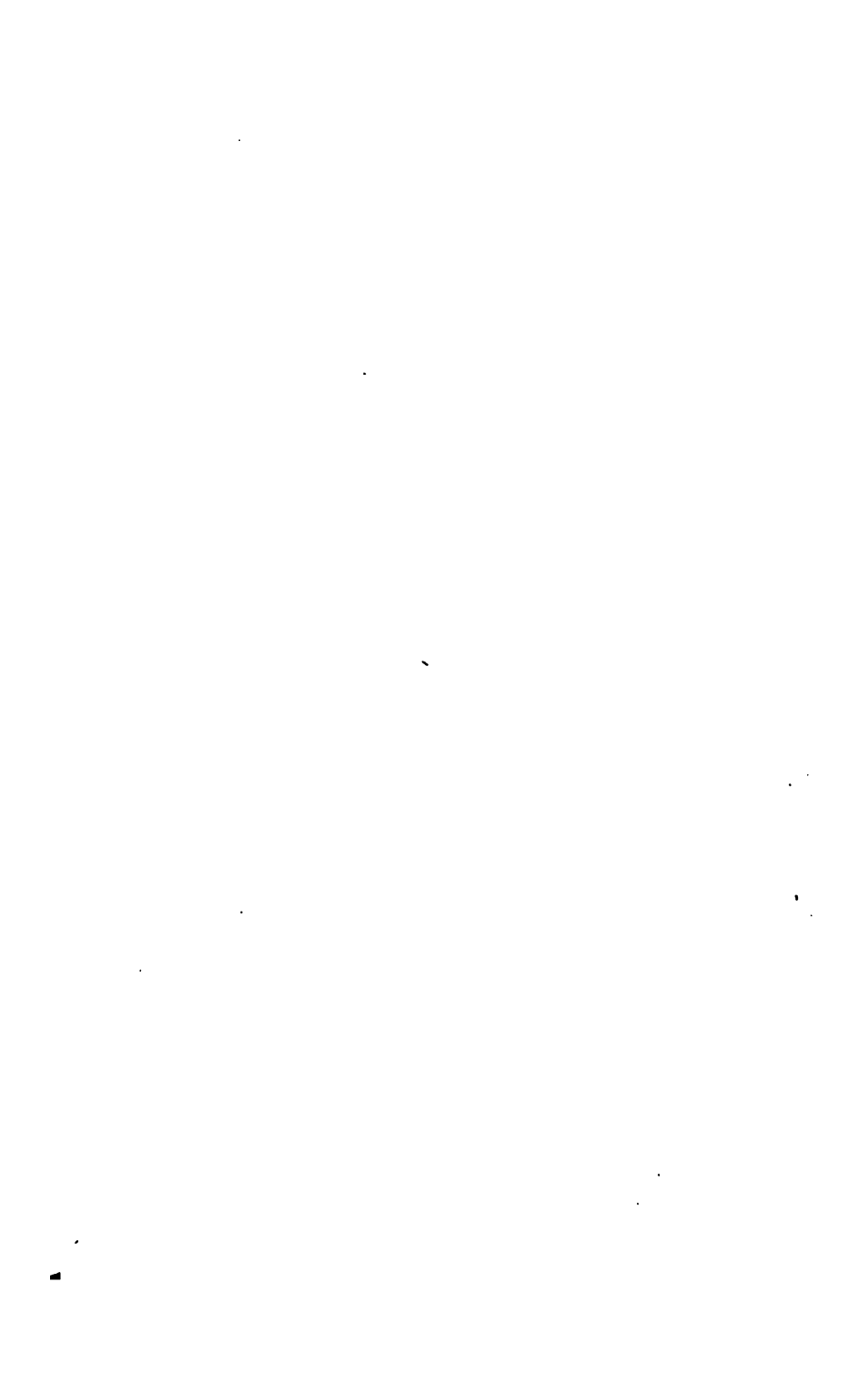
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**Published June, 1919**

## RED FRIDAY

PUBLISHED WEEKLY



# RED FRIDAY

## I

SINCE the killing of Plangonev and the world-resounding revelations of the trial of Charlotte Black I have known it for my duty and the one grave concern of my remaining life to set down step by step my peculiar knowledge of the career and movements of the dead man since his first secret coming to this country, now three years ago; and the details, as I knew them from the beginning, of the evolution of his great plot of debt.

I go back, then, into December, 1919—to that first evening that he came. A blue-fogged winter nightfall in the city—such as we have all too often on Manhattan Isle. First yellow lights, black moving blots of men and motors upon the streets, and in the air the hooting of the steamers from the two encir-

cling rivers—huge hoarse sea beasts, it might seem, come prowling inland with the dark. I looked up sharply to find this unexpected figure in my room—slipped in between the lamplight and the end of the day.

“You do not recognize me,” he said; and the sound of hard, uncouth, northern consonants rolled and thickened in his speech. “You do not recall me.”

“The light is very bad,” I answered, and advanced to turn more on.

“No,” he said, preventing me. “If you please—not.”

And now again I made mental note of the harsh sibilants and dentals in his speech. I stopped then, waiting, while he stood—a short, square, long-coated figure, motionless and unknown.

“I am Plangonev,” he said.

“Plangonev!” I returned, surprised beyond an adequate expression.

I, one of very few in this country at that time, was cognizant of this man and what he meant abroad—the brain of the proletariat, the one great secret mind, such as exists behind all movements, within the social revolu-

tion of the east of Europe; wise with the wisdom of a catastrophic era, and as secret and pitiless in his movements as he was wise. I had met him once before—at the Stuttgart International Congress, in 1907—when the East had met the West in barter and exchange of their ideas upon the ways and means of social resurrection, and the great question of modern war. He was the supposed Doctrinaire of Russia at one pole, I the Christian Socialist of America at the other—but interesting without doubt to one another, by our very difference in type and situation.

“Plangonev!” I said again. “Here, in New York!”

“Why not?” he answered in that now so familiar phrase.

So then I sat him down, and drew the shades and turned on my light. It shone upon that great gray head—“that great brain,” as someone has since described it, “too thinly clad”—and that white spot in the right eye, which was blinded in the Siberian quarry, as he sat there motionless, his hands upon his knees.

“Why not?” he said. “It is but a step. Trotzky was just here.”



"But why are you not," I cried, "in Russia—now?"

"Russia no more requires me now."

"No more requires you!" I echoed him.

"No—now the work is over."

"Over!" I said, misinterpreting him. "That wonderful experiment of the proletariat—over! Lost already!"

The room grew vibrant suddenly with his jarring, scornful laugh.

"America! America!" he said. "Oh, you Americans! You take still what they feed you—the bourgeois, in their poisoned press. We lose—the proletariat in Russia—defeat upon defeat. And yet—our enemies never once advance. Like dogs upon a turning treadmill they trot and trot about the circumference of Russia. And never yet arrive inside. Strange—is it not?"

"I have often thought of that," I said.

"Think of it no more," he told me. "Russia is sure for us."

"But Europe!" I said. "Surely there is work to be done there!"

"Europe," he answered me, "is no less sure; as all know who see it from within."

"Sure," I said after him. "Do you pretend to say," I cried, my eye now kindling from the hope of it, "that secretly—beneath the surface, so to say—our socialistic leaven has gone on working till it has leavened the lump and brought the new freedom—the social millennium upon earth?"

"Far from it," said Plangonev briefly. "This is not socialism. Russia, for example, was not ten per cent socialist."

"What is it, then, that has happened?" I queried.

"Capitalism is dead, that is all—in Europe. There is no capitalism!"

"No capitalism!"

"No."

"Just what do you mean by that?" I inquired.

"How can there be capitalism," he returned, regarding me, "without capital? How shall their state repay the bourgeois what no longer is?" I did not answer him at once, seeing partly what he meant.

"The day has come," he exclaimed—"the day we have been so long awaiting!"

He referred, of course, to the day then so

generally looked forward to by socialists throughout the world—the day when the capitalist system would break down of its own weight; and more especially to the extraordinary prophecies of the great socialist authorities of the end of capitalism by the European War—now so trite to every schoolboy. The voice of Marx, in 1872; the full warning of Frederick Engels, in 1892, to the capitalists of their approaching doom by war; the strangely lucid forecast of the German, Bebel, which we both had heard at the Stuttgart Congress, of the certain suicide of militarism and bourgeois society in a great final burst of war.

All this we recalled, naturally, he and I, he speaking most. And more and more as the Russian spoke, his blood rising to his lifelong hate, I caught the deep burning fire of the man in his scorching words and flashing glance and vehement gesture.

“Gone,” he cried, “absolutely! The capitalist era. Dead by its own act—self-killed by this war of its own making—that it was forced to make by the terms of its own life. An involuntary bankrupt, driven straight to suicide.

“The damned bourgeois,” he cried, and spat scorn from his mouth it almost seemed with those hated words; “they saw it coming, from their accounts, their ledgers, their banks—even before the war’s end—all over Europe. Now you can hear them squealing day and night out of their holes—the rat holes of their filthy press. They see it now almost upon them, rolling in from the East—rolling in from Russia.”

A happy hatred shone from him as he said it.

“Where would it break naturally—the capitalist system?” he asked. “Where it was weakest, certainly,” he answered himself. “In Russia. In Russia first, and now in old Austria-Hungary—and Germany. Soon then in Italy and France; and then again in England—and then here! The defeated and the broken first—and then the rest!” he said; and passed on, elucidating.

I sat and studied him—his fire of hatred, his harsh and antagonistic voice, his striking head, his peasant hands, the pits of peasant smallpox in his face; and the long gray faded overcoat, thrown open now and hanging down—that dingy mantle of the proletariat, as one

might call it, worn in every crowded city slum in Europe, and America, and the world. He seemed to me even then the personification of the new power in the world—the bitter voice of the proletariat come to judgment, cursing their old master.

“The broken and defeated first,” he repeated. “Russia and Austria and Germany.”

“Just how?” I asked. “What is the process of its coming—the kingdom of the workers?”

“Property,” he said with bitter briefness. “They stole it from us, did they not, in the beginning of capitalism? Now we resume it back!”

He passed to more details, with bitter ex-coriation of the bourgeois and their political states—who made the war.

“It is most simple,” he said. “Billions of capital destroyed, shot off into the air in war—for murdering us! By the government of the bourgeois. Who furnished it?”

“Who did? Where did it all come from?” I asked, repeating a question then often in my mind.

“Its owners, naturally; the ones who held it—the damned bourgeois. They stole it from

us and gave it to their government, and took back their government's promises to pay for it—in their old conspiracy to force it once again out of the blood and sweat of the workers.”

“Then what?” I asked.

“They shot it off—all there was—did they not? Till it was gone. They destroyed their capital—all. Then they stopped—collapsed. And then the workers took over the government. That is all.”

“And repudiated the bourgeois government's debt?”

“Why not?” asked Plangonev. “They stole the property first, these bourgeois, for themselves. They destroyed it through their state by war. Should we then pay them for their stolen goods, which they destroyed?”

“But there was violence, great unnecessary violence,” I objected; “especially with you Bolsheviki in Russia! The world is full of the fear of it!”

For I myself and those with whom I was associated had set our faces sternly against violence in this war—in the United States.

“Why not?” asked Plangonev. “What

right have thieves defending stolen goods? Violence—charged by them! I laugh. With five million workers killed in war, what are a few ten thousands of bourgeois?”

“I cannot agree with you,” I said. “I see that differently. Human life must be sacred. Violence would not be countenanced here in the United States as in Russia.”

“Violence,” exclaimed Plangonev, “as in Russia! What more ridiculous than violence and revolution when the proletariat hold the power of social revolution in their hands, as in this country — a revolution of perfect peace and quiet!”

“What power,” I asked, “do you allude to?”

“The debt-making power,” said Plangonev. “The new confiscation for the people.”

And from that he outlined to me for the first time his celebrated plot of debt.

“The debt-making power?” I said, for the idea was then new to me.

“Certainly,” said Plangonev. “What else? The great new world power of the proletariat — which must be used by us now in France and England and the United States, the win-

ners in this war. Especially here, where the most capital still remains unconsumed."

"The new power of the proletariat?" I interjected once again.

"Certainly," said Plangonev. "The power creating public debt—of destroying and confiscating private property by popular vote."

I gazed at him.

"The great, broad, safe highway," he exclaimed, "to socialism. The great, natural, popular method in all democracies—with manhood suffrage—in the last twenty years. And especially here.

"It is marvelous," he went on, "to see! Twenty years ago the public debt of all kinds almost nothing! Now, even before this war, every state and city and town in your political federation was loaded down with public debt to its limit. You know that."

"In a general way—yes," I said, recalling it.

"It is a commonplace of economics," exclaimed Plangonev. "The proletariat, especially in the great cities, taking over private property by taxation, and dividing it among themselves, in wages and salary and provision



—you call it graft, do you not?—for their leaders. For public works.”

“Unconsciously, of course,” I said. “Without socialistic theories.”

“Certainly—as all great social action is,” said Plangonev; and he continued his discussion of the new people’s power, which was so striking, so illuminating to me at that time.

“For twenty years your great bourgeois, your continental capitalists, have seen it coming, and cried out,” he said. “They foresaw capitalism destroyed by it. Your late railroad plutocrat, E. H. Harriman, one of the clearest-minded of them all, gave that warning shortly before his death, you will remember.”

I murmured, remembering it but indistinctly; marveling meanwhile at the detailed knowledge this foreigner had of our affairs. He shamed me, in point of fact. Student I knew he was; but not in such particularity.

“The power of the proletariat for making public debt,” said Plangonev. “With trembling they—the capitalists—have been watching it grow for twenty years. And now with this war, and since, they are in despair!”

I sat now and heard with great surprise and

almost awe the man elucidating to me my own country from the new standpoint of a careful European student.

“We expected much, but now again we are amazed ourselves, we students for the people in Europe, at the progress here—of your affairs. We are astounded by the capital-consuming ability of the United States in this war. In a year and a half of preparation, with three months of fighting for a fraction of your forces, your country has paid out, I read, more than France in her four years of war, with all her population involved. Your capacity for destroying capital by war was incredible.”

“I have read so,” I answered.

“It was promoted naturally, as we all know, by your form of government—always most admirably adapted to the waste of capital. Without central authority for expenditure, without a national budget, without any central means of checking the national outflow. Full of holes as a sieve. But at bottom this great waste came certainly because it was popular—as it will be always—this general division of capital in war to all in a democracy—the small bourgeois as well as the large, the farmer,

the proletariat—by wages, great profits, steady work for the workers. All voters, naturally, in a democracy—ninety-five per cent at least—will encourage the appropriation of property to their own use in war—when war is once started. And so, naturally, the growth of the great national debt!

“All that was wonderful, even during war,” said Plangonev—“your national success in destroying capital by war. But since then the demonstration has been still more hopeful for our cause. Since then you do not stop war, so far as national waste is calculated. Your cost of war during the year before this was approximately twenty billion dollars. This year of 1919 and 1920, without war your costs will be ten billions at the least.”

“Twelve now, at least, I am told by some who know,” I said; “at least.”

“Why not,” said Plangonev, “if popular with all? So waste keeps on; so debt increases. It is beautiful to see—like a fine experiment in chemistry.”

It was the real man who spoke now, using a favorite simile. I could see even then the scientist who witnessed in society agent and

reagent acting like elements in a chemist's brew.

"No," he said. "Our problem and yours are still the same—but your means of solving it are pleasanter and more sure. With us when capital is gone we must seize the government—by violence if required. With you, who now control your Government by popular vote, the ninety-five per cent who benefit destroy the capital by government expenditure and debt; and then the proletariat resume it."

"By repudiating the national debt?" I cried.

"Not at all," said Plangonev. "By taxing the bourgeois and their corporations—who advanced the capital to the Government—till they take it all. You see it, do you not," he asked me, "our plan of debt?"

"I think so," I said, my eyes kindling; "yes."

"The bourgeois advanced the capital—the money—to their Government."

"Yes," I said.

"Then certainly we should make them pay it back to themselves once more—entirely."

"Yes."

"By the new taxes of this war — the income, the inheritance, the corporation tax; those new and happy taxes for the worker, which the bourgeois cannot, as in their former taxes, load back again upon the proletariat."

"I see," I said.

"So then," summed up Plangonev, "they spend their capital in this war; they pay it back to themselves. It cancels — does it not?"

"So it would seem," I said.

"So in the end they have no capital. It is gone."

"And the capitalistic era," I said, my eyes lighting with a great hope, "is gone, without violence!"

"Certainly. Yes."

"A revolution in peace, of perfect peace," I cried joyfully.

"Why not?" asked Plangonev.

"But there will be powerful opposition. There is now," I objected.

"From the great capitalists — certainly. The few of the great bourgeois in the center who can see."

"They are very strong," I said; "they are raising heaven and earth just now in Congress

to prevent the passage of the railroads into the people's hands—the government ownership of our railroads. But can they do it?" I said, arguing—for I was greatly roused by the struggle in our Congress. "At least ninety per cent of the people of the country desire it," I claimed. "The farmers want anything but private ownership of the railroads, which they always fought. The railroad employees want it—government ownership—almost entirely. The railroad stockholders want it as a whole—to be assured of their dividends. Then why do they not get it?" I asked, rising more and more to my theme. "Wall Street, simply. It is simply that small per cent, with their financial hold both direct and indirect upon the Government—upon Congress—upon that eternally reactionary body the United States Senate. It is this alone that prevents it. An outrage!" I exclaimed.

Plangonev sat watching me in his chair.

"I agree with you," he said finally. "That is why I have come to see you now."

"Oh," I said, surprised—and waited.

"You are the only man we know to help us now."

"I!" I cried, astounded. "Help you! In what way?"

"Break up this old ring of capital which still holds by its throat your Government."

"How can I assist," I asked, now absolutely wondering, "in any way? I am no financier."

"Eventually," said Plangonev, moving on his way, "they will break—your great bourgeois—so we believe. But now—in this fight—they should be attacked, too, and broken from within."

I waited for him to elaborate his idea.

"They have a ticklish task at best, the capitalists," he went on. "I do not think they could solve it with their greatest skill. But now to be precisely sure for us we should have help and pressure from both sides—from us and them. We should have one man—the greatest possible—from within, who will betray them, for his own interests, to aid us in the new freedom. So then I come to you."

"To me!" I repeated, in doubt now whether I should laugh or stare.

"Yes," said Plangonev. "You must introduce me to Stephen Black!"

"Stephen Black!" I said, drawing back.

"Yes; certainly," said the Russian. "You, as a man of peace, vouch for me—my safety from violence. The violence which he fears so much!"

I gazed and started. How did he know that, I wondered, of Stephen Black?

"Introduce me," he was going on; "that is all I ask. I will do then the remainder."

"With Stephen Black?" I said, still skeptical. "How?"

"I shall offer to him," said Plangonev, "the greatest stake yet offered to a great bourgeois plunderer in the world!"

He explained to me briefly his bait for Stephen Black. I listened, drawing in my breath as I saw the thing growing to its full magnitude.

"Is it enough?" he asked me finally, with a small and acrid smile upon his face.

"Enough!" I burst out in answer. "There has been nothing like it in the history of the world! Beside it El Dorado is the gilt upon a child's toy. It is," I said, "the looting of a continent, the richest on earth, with the latest improvements of science."



"Why not?" said the Russian imperturbably. "The loot should certainly be great at the breakdown of an era. Will you do it then?" he inquired. "Will you then take me to Stephen Black?"

"No violence!" I stipulated. "Absolutely none." For I still was disquieted by the man — his past, his principles.

"How should there be violence to him now?" asked Plangonev. "With the use we now have for him?"

"There could not be!" I said, convinced. "When shall we go?"

"The sooner the better," said Plangonev.

I took out my watch and caught the hour.

"We could," I said, "go now. It is but a step from here to his house on Fifth Avenue. We should find him there now, I believe. It is his usual custom."

"Let us go and see," said Plangonev, and took up his dingy derby hat.


## II

I COULD not but marvel as I drew on my greatcoat at the precision and accuracy of the man's knowledge. That the Russian Bolshéviki, so called, were close students of this country, as of others, I knew well; that they had their agents constantly among us was in a sense common knowledge, even then; but how was it that this man—this stranger in a most strange land—should be informed with such precise exactness of a matter so few of my own countrymen would know, the one particular service I could render the new freedom, and I perhaps alone? How could he know of my personal relations with the house of Stephen Black?

In my earlier career, ere I became convinced that the essentials of socialism were inherent in the first unaltered Christian faith, I was a ministrant of religion in what has been termed the wealthiest church in Manhattan and in America. As such I saw much of the Chris-

tian rich, as a spiritual and in a way a social intimate. And so it was that I went often into the house of Stephen Black, as a friend and religious comforter in the last days to that aristocratic, and once most beautiful woman, his late wife. From then on, partly from the kindness of memory; partly, I may perhaps flatter myself, because, even after my change of social faith, of a certain tolerant confidence in my motives; and partly, I am sure, because of a faint lingering sunset hope in the mind of Stephen Black of the possible triumph of our faith over death, I still retained entrée to that great dark Fifth Avenue house of his—"that family vault of Stephen Black," as some vivacious gentleman of the daily press named it—to which, as his years advanced and his habit of secrecy grew upon that great secret speculator, fewer and still fewer had admittance.

I was recalling this quite naturally, wondering at our chances of success, as I drew on my outer clothing and we passed out together from my lodging into the blue sickly mist—two emissaries of the new freedom upon our extraordinary mission—and started on to take the few short steps that separated at that time



the very rich, the great bourgeois of America, from the proletariat on the east side of Central Park.

The farther we went the more I grew doubtful about it. That we should see and trade with Stephen Black—that most secret of all men, that mysterious secret influence which capital itself knew only as a misty menacing power always over Wall Street—struck me, as we advanced toward our goal, as more and more unlikely. I voiced my doubts in half apology to my companion, but he seemed now in no way disturbed.

“He will see us only too gladly,” he replied. “With you at hand to tell him I am safe, there is no fear!”

I glanced sharply at him once again. How was it that he knew Black’s fear of death?


We kept our silence and our thoughts then as we went on, and the next word spoken was by Plangonev when as we turned the corner of Fifth Avenue I heard him say: “There they sit—your last words in your American freedom. The damned two per cent!”

“The two per cent?” I echoed him, much puzzled.

"You have read your own Professor King," he said to me. "Then you should know," he said, when I remembered, "the two per cent of the population that now already own three-fifths of all the property in your United States—and soon will have the rest.

"The damned two per cent," he said once again—"the kings of the bourgeois—sucking at the jugular vein of the continent—and always drawing more. A spectacle for future time! It is fortunate for us," he concluded, then, "that now in turn we can use their own machinery to destroy them—the blood-sucking apparatus they used through Wall Street."

And then we passed on together up the street of the great bourgeois. At that time of course the wealth of the American continent was drawn here—into the dwellings of its corporate masters. They lived in a strange variety and assortment of structures—cut in various periods and styles, according to the fashion which chanced at the moment of their building to be uppermost in the favor of those dressmakers of the metropolis, the famous architects. A solid line of quasi castles drawn




from the great resources of the nation—this from one Western railroad, this from another in the Southwest, and this from steel or oil or copper.

They rose beside us as we went—in stark, irregular, dimly lighted masses upon our left—the mansions of the dark and then, at least, forbidding street of the great bourgeois. And as we went my companion cursed them, with great and bitter hate—figuring the bones and blood of starving children that had gone into them.

“Mausoleums built on the bodies of the proletariat,” he said. “Cases for their ridiculous bourgeois art collections—and their women! The women of the great bourgeois,” he said; “like the women of the Egyptians, who bathed their feet for beauty in the blood of slaves.”

I could only keep silence before his outbreak as we passed along, and listen with a shock I could not at last repress to his arraignment of the beauty and folly and cruelty of the women of the very rich—a baneful growth, living at ease upon the misery of the poor like a hectic orchid upon the ruins of a great tree.



I watched him, listened to his outbreak, and was silent with him in his final silence as we approached at last the house of Stephen Black—the man beside me, it now seemed to me, knowing as well as I did his destination. I held back a little, trying him, and I saw him without hesitancy turn upon the steps of the house that we were seeking. The Russian knew it, I saw now, as well as I!

When I saw this thing I had myself a sharp moment of misgiving and alarm. I saw now that he knew—much! There was every sign of it. And what, after all, did I know of the intentions of this man beyond what he himself had told me? Was I deceived—to be an accomplice of some violence upon Stephen Black? All this flashed over me. But then again came back to me the memory of the plan of debt—the simplicity and logic of his desire to meet the great speculator face to face. And I went on. It was too late now at any rate to stop, with our feet upon the threshold of the man to whom in the name of our great common cause I had pledged myself to take him.


It was of red brick with brownstone trimmings, the so-called family vault of Stephen

Black, one of the oldest houses of the upper Avenue, dull and inconspicuous among its newer neighbors, in strict accord with the principles of reticence and withdrawal always present in the mind of its owner. We passed up the dull-brown stone steps, pressed the bell, and stood there waiting at the lace-curtained door.

We must have been—he in his dull workingman's uniform and I in my semi-clerical garb—a curious and unaccustomed spectacle to the eyes of the big door man who opened for us the great black-rimmed front door. Indeed the servant hesitated for a moment. But then recognizing me—one of the few eccentrics allowed the house—he let me in, and with me my still stranger-looking follower. Even with him I became the guaranty and passport Plan-gonev had desired.

“The Rev. J. Appleton Todd,” I heard the man announcing in the rigid waiting silence of the place, for I had asked first, in accordance with my custom, for Miss Black rather than her father.

I heard the sibilance of a woman's skirt approaching across the muffled floors of the in-





terior of the house, and in a moment Charlotte Black appeared to greet us. She was—as is familiar now to every reader of the Sunday press—an exceptionally handsome woman; an example such as I have never since seen of the concentration of the personal elegance which limitless wealth secures. She was a woman even then, not a girl; but still in the first bright flood of the incoming tide of youth. Yet even then there was a hard brilliance in that beauty; and a definiteness and assurance in her manner, natural enough to the social head of that great fortune, no doubt, but which marked her—more in degree perhaps than in kind—from any other woman I have ever known.

On the other hand, in this man in the worker's overcoat, in Plangonev, she met with an assurance, not to say, a mental arrogance, that in no way yielded to her own. I reflected even then that I could have searched the world over and not found two creatures more different in their deepest texture. What he could have signified to her at that time—besides instinctive class repulsion—I could not see. Curiosity, perhaps, to a degree. He spoke no

tongue she could understand, from first to last. But she on her part spoke a language all men understand, young and old, poor and rich, wise as well as foolish—the language of unusual woman's beauty.

Her father, she told us, was not in, and would not be in immediately; and though she rather ceremoniously offered us the immensely costly discomfort of two great black medieval chairs we both remained standing, I somewhat surprised at not finding the master of the house home then, as I had confidently thought he would be, and endeavoring to learn just when we could hope to secure a personal appointment with him.


"That," she said, laughing, "is more than any human being knows; including, I believe, himself."

"Especially now," Plangonev said calmly.

"Yes," she conceded, slightly surprised, "that is true—especially now."

"It is his railroads—his conferences with his members of the national Senate," continued the Russian with the same calm confidence.

"Indeed!" she said, her color rising slightly. "I did not know."



"Yes," said Plangonev. "You will give him this please—if you will." He passed her a small card. "He will know of us, and me. And will you then tell him," he added—and unexpectedly he bowed—"that I hope that in this matter—and all the others now—we should be allies, not enemies. For it is much more wise. He will understand," said the Russian, closing. "And as for the rest, my friend—your Mr. Todd—will speak for me."

"It is indeed a wonderful offer," I affirmed, "that my friend brings to your father. The most wonderful, I should say, in the history of finance."

She looked from one to the other of us—puzzled naturally, if not convinced that we were there on some fantastic social and philanthropic errand.

"It is business—pure business," I said, reassuring her.

"He will know," said Plangonev. "Tell him merely—for me—to act before it is too late."

A greater surprise than mine was written on the face of Charlotte Black as my companion left this message. Who was this man,

her expression asked, with not the slightest touch of the self-depreciation or diffidence that goes with poor clothing the world over, wherever man is man, who left this confident and almost arrogant word for her to carry to her father?

"Very well," she said after a slight hesitation; "I will do so."

Immediately thereafter we left — our going not impeded certainly by any warmth in her manner; and soon we found ourselves in the still street of the great bourgeois again.

I have been asked often by curiosity seekers, and others with more legitimate call to know, just how — in what possible way — these two such opposite creatures first came together. This then was the way of it. I myself introduced them; and I saw their acquaintance from the initial expression on their faces when they met — hers of scorn, or, at most, hostile curiosity; his, I believe I can recall, the immediate dawn of that æsthetic and physical interest, let us designate it, which he displayed in her immediately, from the first closing of the great front door behind us.

"A wonderful thing," he said to me while

we were still on the outside stairs. "In many ways the most attractive form of property they possess."

"What?" I asked him to explain.

"The women of the great bourgeois."

"Property!" I said again.

"What else?" he asked. "The favorite female slave, who spends all her life, who concentrates all the modern arts on what is wanted — physical elegance and beauty. Is any organic thing in more abject economic slavery and uselessness — except for the production of those desired qualities?"

He spoke dispassionately at first — as a biologist upon a butterfly. But there was still that in his voice I did not like.

"We shall set them free," I said — "the women of all the bourgeois, with the real economic emancipation of the new freedom."

And he laughed now — that jarring cynic's laugh again.

"You may not find them of your mind," he said; "desirous of your freedom."

"If they are slaves —" I said, objecting.


"Since when," he asked, "has the pampered idle slave, fed with the economic struggles of

the slave worker, been anxious for the comparative hardship of equality? They will be free at last," he went on, "willing or not. But not till many other changes have preceded—not really of their own will. The women of the bourgeois—no matter how wildly you may hear them talk of freedom—is a special social creature, set apart. A form of property—like the house serfs before our Russian emancipation or your Civil War—least of all adaptable to economic freedom, because most domesticated for their present use. No doubt it is best," he added. "No doubt any creature is most fit for the uses for which it was created."

I drew back from him a little. I remember it quite clearly. His tone grew repellent to me—almost physically.

"This one," he said, "we have just seen, for example. Work? No. It would interfere with the perfection of the things she exists for—mere physical elegance and beauty."

And I caught then as he said it, that first night, outside there in the dimness of the lights in the street of the great bourgeois—that sudden hardness of desire in his voice; that sudden light in his eyes, that evil light which starts,



I presume, in the eyes of the expectant pillager of cities in a victorious war.

I saw it, yes — his purpose, if it can be called such — even at that time. But, naturally, under the circumstances I attached no practical importance to it then. To my mind, and to his, came back our consideration of the first steps in our plot of debt — of our access to the great secret speculator, Stephen Black; of which, I confess, I was still skeptical.

But the Russian was now all at ease. “He will see me,” said Plangonev. “He will come out of his secrecy now that you are with me — in the time-honored mission of the priest — to exorcise the fear of sudden death.”

I watched him sharply once again — disregarding, as I knew I must for the common cause, his unpleasant slurring outburst against my cloth. But what was it that he really knew about the policy of secrecy — the fear of Stephen Black; the fear and secrecy in which the great bourgeois always lived?

### III

MUCH has been written—both at that time and since—of the secrecy of mind and habit of Stephen Black and of the class, the great bourgeois of America, which he to the last degree personified. To this secrecy and almost stealth in the life of this class, even about their own personal mansions on Fifth Avenue, I myself can testify. And I know whereof I speak. My feet have been upon their secret entrances and stairs, my hands upon their false-paneled doors; and my ears have heard the passwords to the liveried guardians of their secret gates.


And as I came to know them more I recognized that aside from personal fear of the proletariat—which some of them did have—secrecy of movement was inherent in their situation. They were operators and often manipulators of great corporate properties; and that man was rare indeed who did not have his formula for profiting by the manipulation,



or investment, if you prefer the word, in the properties he controlled or shared control in. Some of these operations took the form of long-term manipulations—profits by means of favored securities, of controlled properties, extending over a series of years; some of the mere buying and selling on a great scale of special corporation stocks in the stock market.

This being the case it is evident that the movements of this class called in their very essence for secrecy. They held in their possessions great secrets of wealth, which other men by the thousands, round the financial district of Wall Street in particular, were continually stalking with the assiduity and cunning of skilled hunters of great game. And in the very nature of profit taking in stocks, if they themselves were to secure to their personal advantage the great gains they were cultivating in their corporations, not only their plans and thoughts but even their physical movements must be scrupulously concealed.

But of all these men—this group of, let us say, twenty-five great bourgeois at the center of the wealth of the continent—none, as has been amply shown since, practiced or required



absolute secrecy of plan and movement to the same extent as Stephen Black. He was not even known at that time, but by the very few, as the wealthiest man in America, his cousin overtopping him in that reputation in the popular mind. But it was within my knowledge, and that of others, that even then Stephen Black was a still wealthier man than Benjamin, and that it was the very habit of close secrecy which had kept him from popular knowledge that had made him so.

He was, in fact—so carefully was the real man hidden, even in the financial district more a name than a man—a myth, an unknown and menacing power, working in the dark, coming and going and taking his profits with him, from great stealthy unseen forays upon the stock market, known only through their results. “The Great Silence,” someone had called him; the speculator who could never lose—a thing impossible of course, but in his case as nearly possible as could be. He had at that time, perhaps, six hundred million dollars of his own, besides the resources of banks with which he was affiliated. He had access to the secret knowledge—upon which the great bour-

geois as a class operated—of a very large percentage of great American corporations; and he had the inestimable advantage of the gift of secrecy—cultivated to its last possible point.

This habit of secrecy—formed for obvious business purposes after the fashion of his kind—grew more and more upon him, as habit will with age, until it reached, some said, almost the proportions of a disease. It was heightened now, as I could see, by a growing fear of death. Stephen Black, it was known even then, was haunted by some mysterious and menacing disease. A young and very talented doctor—a specialist in his trouble—followed and watched him continually, in a service more close and exacting than that of any personal attendant. The fear of death, as I interpreted then, was continually on Stephen Black, alternating with his singular acquisitiveness, not to say avarice, in furnishing the main impulses to his life.

It was the allusion to this fear by Plangonev that had three times arrested my attention. It seemed strange that he should know and count upon this little-known personal charac-

teristic of that secret mind; and it seemed stranger still when that next morning his expectation was fulfilled to the letter, and early after breakfast I was called by the ringing of my telephone, and had for the first time the distinction of listening to Stephen Black's own voice over the wire.

"This man," he said, with his customary economy of words, "who was here with you last night—is he safe for me to see?"

"Physically?" I asked; and I could not but smile to myself, remembering the Russian's prediction, as I said it.

"Yes."

"I would guarantee it with my life," I said.

"All right," he said succinctly, "you shall. Provided," he added, "you have the gift of silence—as I guess you have."

"It is supposed to be," I said with some dignity, "a primary qualification of the priest."

"At nine o'clock then," he said, "to-night—at the Sixty-fifth Street entrance."

"Very well," I said; and we closed the wire.

I sat down suddenly then, and strove to realize what had happened. One thing was clear—the plot of debt was advancing exactly

as the Russian had predicted. Stephen Black had known already, I believed, of Plangonev and his possible uses; he had known, I conjectured, something already of his proposal; and as for myself I fitted in exactly at the place assigned to me—a sponsor against violence, a hostage; one chosen to play the part of the taster of the wine at the potentially poisoned banquets of the medievals; and, if any violence or death were threatened, to be there in person to avert or share it—a friend of both parties, trusted by both at the essential point of difference.

So then the miracle had happened; the seemingly impossible had been made possible through me, and we were there at the Sixty-fifth Street entrance of the Blacks at five minutes before nine.

The arrangements of the secret entrances of the house of Stephen Black were as simple as they were complete. The house, it will be remembered, stood in the middle of a block on Fifth Avenue, facing Central Park. In the rear—property held in other names—Black owned two houses partly used for his domestic economy, but primarily to afford him

entrances on either side street at the rear. The houses were both of the most commonplace appearance, and it was characteristic of the man and his operations that both these more devious ways led more directly to his great working office at the rear of his house than the front and public one did.

We went up—Plangonev and I—by the secret staircase, ostensibly an inclosed stone fire escape, passed the sturdy liveried ex-policeman who was stationed at the door, and came in the second story to the great dark, full-paneled office—moved bodily from some old noble's dwelling in northern Italy. The door slid back into the wall; we passed in, and found there Stephen Black with his doctor, waiting to receive us.

He shook hands with us—giving the soft, lax-fleshed hand of a sedentary old man.

“My doctor says I can have twenty minutes with you,” he stated. “Is that right?” he asked, looking across the great room.

A lean-cheeked, saturnine-faced young man with the essential pessimism of a skilled modern doctor written in his face bowed, partly answering him, partly recognizing us, and then

went out the door beside which he had been waiting.

It was Doctor Tideway, the specialist; known in these recent days in the press as the Master of Black.

Then we sat down about a marvelous old dragon-infested carved table.

"Now what is it you have to say?" demanded Black abruptly.

"Will you do it?" Plangonev asked back. "Will you change the vote of your senators on the railroad-ownership matter?"

I could see now that my suspicion was correct—that they had been in touch with one another by correspondence. They came face to face now with a perfect understanding of the matter they were about to discuss.

"But why should I?" asked Stephen Black. "Even if I could?" he hastened to add.

He sat well down in his chair—a face not precisely like the familiar face of his cousin Benjamin—more virile, but not less, let us call it, shrewd. An oaken purpose, burned a little into the ashes of life; cheeks cross-hatched with the lines of those who plan and plot; a type of the great bourgeois—the soft-

bodied, cold-handed men in the swivel chairs who ruled America at that time by the force of thought and eye strain. I sat and watched them—those two secret masters of capital and labor—those two great manipulators of the main simple wires which set the puppet man to dancing. Of the two Plangonev was stronger physically, as might be expected of the younger man—carrying, too, the blood of peasants in his veins. The great bourgeois was older, colder, with the physical habit of his blood and kind, soft fleshed and cold, but with an eye out of his wrinkles at once bright and inscrutable—an eye, I have often thought, with the strange wisdom of an old, old turtle in a park. And yet, even then, with that strange look lurking in them, curiously peering out—that look of fear.

“Why,” he asked the Russian, “should we change now, when we have what we want?”

“Only for now,” the other answered, “if at all! We should change the members of the Senate if need is.”

“You haven’t changed them yet,” said Black, unmoved.

But Plangonev merely laughed.



"Why speak thus? Why waste our time," he said calmly, "when we have so little? You are too wise for this. You know as well as I do. The agrarians, the farmers, the small stockholders, the laborers—are all against you; for the government ownership. They will outvote you at the last."

"The organized laborers," responded Black, his face not changing, "are certainly not with you."

And I saw, of course, that he recognized and was depreciating the share that Plangonev was to contribute to their alliance.

"Organized labor, what is that?" inquired the Russian. "Not twenty per cent. Unorganized labor that we shall control is what will count. And all, at the end! But why talk? You know us already. Not the tame labor, but the free which we control."

He laughed again, and his laugh and the validity of his argument had power, it seemed, to rouse Black at last.

"What do you take me for?" said the American, straightening up a little in his high Italian chair. "Vote for you—no! In railroads or in anything." And he sat back—

remembering now no doubt his physician and his disease.

Plangonev merely waited—with an outward gesture of his hand.

“Do you think,” said Black then, clearly now with the air of a man on the failing side of an argument—“do you think we shall stand and let this thing run over us—this program of public debt of yours? Do you think that we are fools—to fall into that?” And I saw then, I thought, that odd look of fear increasing in his eyes.

“How will you avoid it?” Plangonev interjected.

“That trap!” Black passed on. “Those pincers! Do you think we do not see that pair of pincers? On the one hand you put the spending of the money in government hands. You pay labor more than it can earn. You raise the wages, you raise the prices of material; and keep them raised. Every corporation also pays your prices.”

“Precisely so,” said Plangonev.

“That raises the costs of every corporation in the country above what it earns,” said Black. “There is one side of the thing. On the other

side you gouge every dollar you spend and waste for the Government out of the corporations themselves—or the men who run them—by these damned things—these new war taxes.”

“Precisely,” said the Russian.

“If we let go,” said Black, his eyes now almost protruding in his excitement, “if this thing grows—this waste, this public debt—as it is now growing since this war, in ten years there won’t be a private corporation left standing in this country. Nor a dollar for the owner of a stock.”

I had never dreamed the man had so much power of excitement left in him. It was evidently a flare-up of strength from a great nervous pressure. “Not one dollar,” he said. “No!”

“That is exactly,” said Plangonev, “why I am here.”

“Here!” returned Black, and for the moment I feared his anger might endanger his health. But he caught himself in time. “Here!” he said and sat back, exhausted by emotion, to give his tiring powers a rest.

“Precisely,” said Plangonev, profiting by

his silence to explain. "I am here to see you realize that; and if you do, that you will make an alliance with us."

At this Stephen Black made a motion to sit up in his high chair, but stopped again, remembering.

"One thing you can do—and one only—for your personal interest!" said the Russian. "And I am bringing it to you. Allow this process to go as it goes on now—drift, drift down by degrees out of your hands in the corporations, and you will go down like the rest of them, of all your class—to nothing. On the other hand you and I together—you and I," he said, now raising his voice, "by joining forces can make more money than any two men since the world began."

I could see the answering flash of interest start in the great speculator's eyes.

"You, with your financial and legislative machinery; I and my associates to excite labor—the free labor, not the tame. To bar at once any movement to reduce the present rate of wages."

"Well?" said Black, rousing slightly.

"Pressure," continued Plangonev, "on

either end—from capital and labor. No concession absolutely, on either side!”

“How much?” asked Black abruptly. “What is your price for this—if it should work?”

“We must have our ten per cent.”


“Of what?”

“Of what you make from our agitation, for our propaganda. I cannot carry it on for less—to get the benefit of the plan, worked out to the end, after the Government takes the railroads.”

“What is the plan you talk about after the Government takes the railroads?” said Black, interested now, quite evidently. “Tell it to me now yourself. Go over it in detail.”

And the Russian told him then, holding him with his one bright eye. Part after part he elaborated the operation of the machinery of the plot of debt—Black watching him with cold eyes and still face.

“The working of the pincers, in short, as you have prescribed it,” he said to Black. “On the one hand the cost of every private corporation raised in every last particular—by government competition for labor and materials.”



Black nodded, considering.

"And on the other hand making the corporations pay that cost a second time—the Government's costs—by their taxes, at every possible point."

Black's body started rising slowly in its chair.

"What will be left," asked the Russian, "of corporations after two years—especially for the common stock?"

"And in the meanwhile," said Stephen Black, continuing, "I sell the market short on everything in turn?"

"Except when it seems best that your Government take over any industry for a special reason—like the railroads."

"Certainly," said Black, and stopped, staring at the richly paneled walls across from him.

"By God!" he burst out suddenly then, as if against his will. "General ruin. Sell America short from top to bottom!"

"Why not?" asked Plangonev.

Then the door reopened and the ascetic-faced young specialist—the keeper of Black—appeared again.

"Time's up," he said briefly.

"Will you do this, then?" asked Plangonev, rising.

"Why not?" said Stephen Black, borrowing for the moment the Russian's own idiom.

And so, on the evening of December 18, 1919, the plot of debt was virtually agreed upon in my presence. The working out of details and the enlisting of the others needed took place, of course, later.

## IV

IN order to understand the plot of debt it is well that the reader bear in mind the very simple machinery by which it was carried out.

Our first step, then, was to create what Stephen Black had so aptly called the great pincers, in which the private capital in corporations was to be crushed. To do this we must first, so to say, establish one jaw of the pincers immovably, by stimulating in every possible way the competition of the Government against the private corporations for labor, material and credit.

This done, we reasoned, the other jaw—of ruinous taxation to pay the Government's bills—would necessarily, of its own motion, as it were, close upon private corporate capital and cause the end of it. That was our theory—which we hastened to carry out in practice in the following way:

By the division of labor in our scheme Black naturally would have the financial power. As



stocks of corporations declined in value this master of Wall Street speculation, we conceived, would profit in an enormous sum by so-called short selling—that is to say, by profiting by the fall of stock prices upon the stock exchange. He would then become in effect our treasurer for the new freedom; a fixed percentage of his winnings would be set aside and always held by him available for our freedom fund; and meanwhile Plangonev on his side would be in touch with all radical elements or leaders of labor or politics to whom the expenditure of enormous funds would be of interest, and through them see that the temper of the proletariat was kept at the proper pitch; that labor made absolutely no concession; that the Government's high war scale of wages was used by labor always as a fixed measure; and that any lapse below that would be met by the vigorous and violent opposition of Plangonev's so-called free labor—the great excitable unorganized mass, quite often of foreign origin, where Plangonev and his associates were most influential.

“No concession on either side!” that was to be our battle cry. By this simple and effective

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device of Plangonev we hoped to accomplish the early and progressive ruin of capitalism in the United States, and by the most ingenious irony to finance the new freedom entirely by the ruins of its antagonist, particularly by turning upon it its own chief machinery for gathering the wealth of continents—the common stock of corporations.

The success of the opening campaign is far too familiar for me to detail. The taking over of the railroads by the national Government—with the opposition of any notable party of the great central capitalists in Wall Street removed—was a foregone conclusion. The government taking of the railroads was agreeable to the great and influential agrarian vote; it was desired by the proletariat, by the employees of the railroads, and by a great body of smaller stockholders, who feared loss of dividends through the persisting high operating costs of wartime. The politicians also were not unmindful of the advantages that might come to them through the change. So with the secret turning of Black's influence at the center of opposition, the taking over of the railroads by Congress became a matter of

course, and the huge and still increasing government debt was again increased by some eighteen billion dollars of securities issued for the country's railroads—thus reaching altogether the almost incredible figure of approximately fifty billion dollars.

On the whole this was generally acceptable to the nation; high prices were continued, the farmer and the small bourgeoisie profited, the laborer had a high scale of wages. Only at the financial centers, the banks and corporation offices about Wall Street, was there apprehension and, it would not be too much to say, despair over corporate earnings; especially upon common stock, for which earnings were now, in fact, largely gone. But on the face of affairs, from the standpoint of the great mass of population, matters were quite satisfactory; and it was to the general surprise of the uninformed public that the great strikes of the winter of 1920-21 took place.

In that connection I recall, of course, the sinister and to me always repellent figure of Honest John Hardman, so called—the chief agitator in this episode of those great strikes, and at that time in the sympathy of and almost



universally popular among the great mass of the workers in the cities.

I met him again at the room which Plangonev had taken for himself in an old half-ruined tenement in the nearer East Side—not far east from that great crossroads of the proletariat, Chatham Square. An old woman, with the usual wig, had ostensible charge, during daytime only, of the floor on which he lived, received various agents, produced his correspondence, and carried on by day that private newspaper-clipping agency with which he kept himself in touch with the general temper of the American people.


It was there I again experienced the rough handshake and alcoholic warmth of greeting of this man. Honest John, the leader of rough labor—the rednecks, as they were sometimes designated. He was at that time working out the details of the great teamsters' strike, which was the start of the other great troubles of that memorable year.

“We have got them with us—everywhere,” he said, cursing plentifully, according to his custom, as an evidence of manly faith and sincerity. “We have got the public—if for

nothing else but because so many of our men have just come back from over there. We have got the general public asking," he went on, "why it is, when the United States Government can pay decent living wages, these damned, fat, crooked corporations in New York won't give their men decent hours and pay."

That was roughly true, of course. Men who had risked their lives for the republic and had come home and retired from government to private employ were not pleased to find themselves securing lower wages and longer hours than men similarly employed in government work had been and were still enjoying—not in the railroads only, but in shipbuilding and telephone and telegraph and public works, all matters which the Government with its great credit was still maintaining, for the express purpose, of course, of taking care, to its last ability, of the returned soldiers, and with them, of the war worker, who had been paid to meet war costs of living.

At the same time, in spite of his apparent popularity, I personally distrusted then, as always, Honest John Hardman. His smiles and handshake and back slapping were all lost



on me. I knew his past. A heartier, more cordial murderer never slapped the back of the laboring man; nor a greater coward, I will add, in my personal opinion. And I was far from pleased to see him on my occasional calls as one of the chief agents and associates of Plangonev.

I almost wished when I saw him I had no part in the movement. And I took the first possible opportunity to warn the Russian against him — thinking that naturally he might not in this case be familiar with this American agitator's record.

"He comes," I said, "in the first place from an aristocracy of labor; a peculiarly American class, I sometimes think, rough men, independent by nature and occupation, at intervals highly paid, and resentful in proportion to their greater wages. A class, indeed, much increased by our late war. And his use of dynamite and wholesale murder, in entire disregard of possible loss of any lives, has been particularly uncalled-for."

Plangonev only smiled.

"In my opinion," I said, rousing myself, "he is not only dangerous to the cause—if

you are not moved by that—but he is both an untrustworthy agent and a dangerous partner. A more unscrupulous ruffian never shook a horny hand or smiled across the bar of an old-time workingman's saloon. And in the end you will be lucky, if you cross him, to come through with your own life."

"Do not be alarmed," Plangonev reassured me. "We shall have no dynamite here."

"How can you be sure?" I returned.

"We have a saying," said Plangonev, "in Russia: 'When the Cossack meets the Jew it is not always the Jew that suffers.'"

"How can you assure me," I insisted, "against his customary violence?"

"Very simply," said Plangonev. "It is I who hold the purse strings."

He smiled again at me—his slow, scornful, fatalistic Asiatic smile.

In his statement, of course, Plangonev alluded to his arrangement with Stephen Black for handling by himself that immensely ingenious and powerful instrument for our propaganda of the new social freedom—the celebrated fund of freedom. For now the well-remembered panic of the millionaires of

1921 was well started and under way — with Stephen Black gathering in his most extraordinary profits.

Just how much Stephen Black cleared during this period no one can be sure beyond himself — and Plangonev, probably, who took his percentage for our fund of freedom. I myself purposely avoided learning. But the final loss on the general and more public listed stock, outside of government securities, as I recall it roughly, was figured at from seven hundred million to a billion dollars; and playing in and out the market continually with his tremendous resources Black's profits were certainly immensely great. The pincers of which Black had spoken to Plangonev were at work — in good earnest.

On the one hand the prices of labor and materials were held up, with the applause of the great majority — the laboring classes and farmers who profited. On the other hand the taxes to pay for new government expenditures and interest on debt were fastened on the corporations and the very rich with every ingenuity which politicians, sure of the great majority's approval, were able to invent. The new



taxes, framed first by the "Agrarian Administration during the war," were, as Plangonev said, the happiest popular taxes ever devised by man, because aimed against such a small minority in the population — corporations and the corporations' owners and the very rich — an almost negligible element numerically in a popular vote.

The corporations were, in fact, caught in a vise. They could not stop, in many instances, because their very essence required operation. A closed plant is a fast-decaying plant; and closing too, especially at a time of ill feeling such as Plangonev had instigated, might easily result in still further loss from violence. The companies must operate if expenses were covered, and even operate at a considerable loss. And in some cases at least — especially in those of public utilities, such as street railways and lighting companies — the equity of the common stock was now gone; and the leaders of city politics were beginning — in fact had even before begun — to take over the properties into public ownership.

The whole movement — the first great plutocrats' panic of 1921 — was, in fact, too suc-

cessful. It was not only advisable, it was essential for the parties who were profiting most to call a halt in it. From the standpoint of Stephen Black it was fatal policy to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs, for the suspension of the Wall Street stock exchange was now under consideration. And from the standpoint of Plangonev it would be almost as suicidal, so he held, to the great purpose for which he was working—the leading by degrees of the American people—without their own knowledge, but through their natural tendencies—into the general rule of the proletariat.

So the acute pressure, financial and economic, was eased off. Such provocative agencies as Honest John Hardman were for the moment called off, before credit really broke down and the great bulk of securities belonging to the small American owner—the bonds and other underlying claims in the hands of savings banks and insurance companies—had suffered any very serious depreciation. The American people—in Plangonev's opinion and in mine—would not have patiently endured that at this time without reaction.

## V

THE American people, in fact, according to Plangonev, must be handled very carefully in his plan of debt, because they were altogether the least socialistic and most bourgeois people on the earth. They were driven, according to him, most of all by the great general impulses of the bourgeois—by what he termed the emotions of property.

I often talked with him on the great main social question of property, and heard his somewhat startling views, but none interested me more than his theory of the impulses—which he hated—given to our daily life by his so-called emotions of property or possession, to which the American people were especially susceptible and by which, in fact, they were continually manipulated by their leaders.

Such of course was the instinct for saving—for small private investment; and such was the strong desire for the personal possession of land. The agrarian movement coming out of

the formerly discontented West and South, which had swept and finally for a decade controlled the country, though used by Plangonev to its limit, was a constant source of jest and amusement to him.

“They consider themselves radical,” he said, “as they play most gayly with their public ownership—through their representatives, the agrarian lawyers in Washington. In reality they are the most bourgeois—the American farmer—the most possessed and swathed by the emotions of property of any class in the whole realm of your Government. Take, for example, nationalism, the so-called love of country—that cause of wars and slaughter which we proletarians hate more than all else. In what other class has it flourished to such a high degree as in the owners of land?” he would ask.

I could not of course agree entirely with him—much as I deprecated war—upon the necessity of going so far as to eliminate nationalism—or, as we have always called it, love of country.

“There is something very dear to me in the thought,” I told him.

"There would be," said Plangonev, with the brutal frankness toward me which I found after all in a certain way his chief charm. "You do not come from the people—you. You are half bourgeois. You can never out-grow your first early training—the office stamp of your class, impressed on you at the plastic stage of your growing mind. But they are all the same—the same origin—your bourgeois emotions," he would say. "Even religion, like nationalism, is a protection for class and property always—since long before the beginning of the Jew," he would say, and smile. "But of this of course I may not speak to you," he would add.

And he would then go on to outline the constant training and manipulation in a bourgeois government of the people by these so-called emotions of property—in school, in the theater, in politics, in the press, and even in the moving pictures; by these emotions—derived primarily from the fact of personal possession, then emotionalized and idealized under symbols for the national god, for the national flag, for the home, for the possession of one woman of your own in marriage.

"Marriage," I said, objecting—"property?"

"Why not?" he would retort. "Is not the property power of the husband over the wife absolute outside of the mere fiction of the law? Is there any control any more absolute than the control of food and clothing? Is there any possession more jealously and actively guarded than the fidelity of the woman? Is there any other property you can recall of which one single alienation of use is sufficient for the death penalty by the voice of all unwritten bourgeois law and custom? You know that," he would say when I objected, "as well as I do."


I could not agree with him in this theory in the least; and I was frank to tell him so. It was extremely repellent to me and I returned to it again and again, to combat it, for it puzzled and I must say fascinated me as he elucidated it.

He defended it, and his own personal position in the matter, with perfect frankness; as he did practically every doctrine that he held.

He carried that frankness with him, at that period at least, wherever he went; and I was

not surprised, though not entirely reconciled, when I knew he talked his favorite theory on the emotions of property, which now drove mankind to their harm, with perfect freedom to Charlotte Black, when in the course of business he was in the house of her father. There has been a tendency—a suggestion in the first name, caught up of course by the daily press, to make Charlotte Black another heroine of a nation's revolution. But in reality she was no Charlotte Corday; far from it! At that time she was as cold and self-seeking a young woman as great wealth can produce—bright and hard as the jewel on her hand. And she was led—as so many women of her kind—into her own dangerous experiment by sheer woman's curiosity; as dangerous to-day as in the fatal moment of Pandora.

Here beside her, to be had for calling, was this strange and novel creature of another world—something pleurably dangerous for an idle time, a ghost, an oracle, a horrid subterranean power to be raised up and heard and seen, and then dismissed with a happy shudder of security. And naturally by the same token their conversation turned to the theories of



emotion—the most compelling and dangerous subject to women; and finally always of course focused upon marriage. She talked with him, I knew, when I was not present; and stimulated dispute between us when I was there.

“What is your plan?” she would inquire of him. “What would you do in your new state of freedom? What position would woman be in?”

“They shall be free agents, economically and socially,” he said. “For the possession of marriage now—then the free association of equals!”

“That is not necessarily our doctrine—of socialists,” I warned her.

“Not of the half bourgeois, half socialist. No. Not the half slave and half free,” he would answer with his usual personal scant courtesy of debate. “It is merely the logic of the situation.”

“And what of the children?” I would say. “Their possession?”

“They are first of all wards of the state,” he said. “They will be taken from their mothers early, especially the boys—for their good, as they are now by the rich of England,



by their great public schools—to be rid of the debilitating influences of the woman.”

At this Charlotte Black laughed—her brilliant teeth bright in her dark, rich-colored face.


“It is too much,” I answered. “It may be logic, but it is not the habit of the race. You cannot change our oldest, deepest emotions by enactment or even by logic.”

“Have I said so?” asked Plangonev.

“No, never. Our whole campaign here now is based upon using the emotions of this public as we find them. But that does not dignify these emotions socially. No, not even if they are delivered to us, as we know they are, from the time and the claws of the cave man.”

And Charlotte Black would laugh at us, urging us on.

“They are alike—all!” said Plangonev after leaving her. “These women of the great bourgeois—and their lesser sisters. They slum, they go across to war, for curiosity. For them, they think, the people of the slums are kept like curious beasts in a menagerie to visit and inspect for their amusement. They have the same idea of the real poverty of the proletariat as children in a park.



“But enough,” he would say with a gesture. “Why take them seriously, as intellectual, reasoning creatures? Why quarrel with Nature? Take them for what they purport and strive to be—elegant, beautiful physical creatures. Works of art for the attraction of man.”

I must say I cared very little for his theories or his code of conduct concerning women. He spoke of this one always with the voice of logic, but in the tone of personal desire; and with that look upon his face, as I have said—that evil light—that gleam from the eyes of law-free plunderers of cities.

I could regret now both the accident that had brought him into the acquaintance of Charlotte Black and the woman’s curiosity that had prolonged it. And there were several occasions when I thought seriously of warning her against too great a familiarity with this slum monster, whom she found amusement in provoking and tantalizing mentally and physically. But then, under the existing circumstances, such a warning would have been grotesque as well as impertinent; and as a matter of fact I will confess it seemed then a thing of relatively small importance. There were other

matters upon us then, at that particular time when we came to the Black house most, for Stephen Black was then gathering and we stimulating and sharing in the immense profits of the second stock-market panic in the spring of 1922.

## VI

By the fall of 1921, it will be remembered, Congress and other governmental bodies, stimulated and indeed compelled by the weakened and distressed condition of private industry, had extended the realm of public operation into still larger territories. The railroads were already government property; the agitators in the cities had had their will, and the public utilities—street railways and lighting systems—had been taken over by the municipal authorities, often under extensions of the former city debt limit by legislative action. And now the telegraph and telephone systems—long proposed as branches of the government service—were taken over; and the building and operation of ships were made permanent government activities—with certain other iron and steel industries associated with them. This with great extensions of public work gave employment to larger and still larger bodies of voters at high wages.

All this was ideal for our purpose in our plot of debt. It turned great and increasing sections of industry—practically all of the controlling agencies of transportation and intelligence—into the hands of the state; and, still more to our purpose, it increased the public debt by leaps and bounds. By the fall of 1921 the national debt itself was fifty-five billion dollars and still growing rapidly.

To promote this government ownership Plangonev and Stephen Black had worked their dual manipulation of finance and labor to its utmost—the former for obvious reasons, the latter because he desired his great profit-gathering machine in Wall Street to be resuscitated for his future use. But this done, in the spring of 1922 the old working of Black's giant pincers upon private capital began again. The necessary friction between capital and labor was promoted by Black on one side and Honest John Hardman on the other, until disaster not only seemed to be inevitable but immediate. The stock market of course registered it; and the sheer collapse which came resulted then in the first closing of the Wall Street market.

I well remember my first visit with Plangonev to the house of Stephen Black on the evening of that day, and our passing up the street of the great bourgeois. They stood there above us — those great half castles — still physically unchanged from the night of our first passing; still repellent, costly, secret. But we knew of course — with all the world — what a difference now existed within many of them — the houses of the certain large percentage of the rich who had held, for the purposes of control, the common stock, the machinery which they had first elaborated to drink up the profits of their enterprises. It is not necessary to name these great bourgeois families — they are too well known. With the sudden collapse of the stock market there was practically no sale for their holdings, now almost universally without dividends. They were merely useless bits of paper.

We spoke of this, naturally, Plangonev and I; and I argued with him, I remember, concerning the advisability of such wholesale slaughter of common stocks.

“The process,” I said, “necessarily will involve the hostility of those thousands of small

bourgeois on whom from time to time the great wholesalers and manufacturers of common stock have unloaded it. This is poor policy now."

"To a certain extent, yes," said Plangonev. "But we are catching and destroying a great number of the big ones by it; and the rest of them—the damned two per cent—as you know, we shall get later. And now that the railroads are held and paid for by the Government the number of common stockholders in the general population is negligible when it comes to a popular vote."

"That is true," I said, "I know. I was merely a little alarmed about it."

"It is a good beginning," said Plangonev, who was in unusually high spirits that night. "The first financial curse of America has been broken—the great bourgeois will no longer pump out the life-blood of the proletariat by that damnable contrivance called common stock."

And then we passed into the secret entrance on Sixty-fifth Street, and up to meet Stephen Black and his lugubrious-faced doctor in his working office again.

The more than two years of campaigning for ruin had not aged Black materially except for one sole thing—a very curious difference, a change in the expression of his eyes. They seemed to have in them more and more now an expression of fear. They were more prominent; it even seemed to me at times almost bulging. But that I thought of course might be only my imagination. It was but natural after all that his fear of death should grow upon him. Two years at his age had naturally burned away much of the candle still remaining. And it was to be expected that he should realize this, and fight continually the inevitable. He was now under his personal specialist's command more than ever—voluntarily more and more. And he still insisted that I should fulfill my part—as hostage and guarantor against possible violence from the Russian, whom he never trusted, knowing his acts abroad of course and whose personality, I thought I began to see, he less and less relished having near him. They were coming of course, with the accomplishment of their common purpose, nearer and nearer the breaking point, and they both naturally knew it.



I cannot say—though I was present at all their calculations—just what Stephen Black's profits were through this last campaign of their conspiracy of ruin for America. Various estimates have been made. But of this I can be sure—it could not have been less than five hundred million dollars—of which Plangonev would have had his ten per cent, or fifty million dollars, for our fund, the fund of propaganda for the new freedom.

Such gains I know seem incredible, but it must be remembered that, in the tremendous financial cross currents of the preceding war, millions had been cleared by relatively small men in the Wall Street stock exchange; tens of millions, doubtless, by such manipulators as Stephen Black; and so it will be seen that such profits at such a time as this were not unproportional to those which Black himself must have taken earlier.

So here at last the wealth-gathering machinery of Wall Street reached both its culmination and its end. Here was the looting of a continent with a vengeance—with all the modern appliances of civilized society. The value of common stock in American corporations

had been eliminated to an astonishing degree; in many cases wiped out entirely. And in the sale of these of course lay the one great chance for profit in operations such as Stephen Black conducted in his so-called short selling. The stock exchange was at least temporarily closed, and there was altogether in the atmosphere of the meeting of that night—though nothing was pronounced outright—a sense of parting of the ways between these two strange fellow partners in general ruin—Plangonev and Stephen Black.

We passed out early; Doctor Tideway was insistent on early hours for his charge that night. And as we turned out onto Sixty-fifth Street Plangonev voiced to me the same feeling I was sensing. "We are gone and well rid!" he said to me. "He has now what he wants. He would be through with us—by any means."

"I warned you," I said, "from the first. He is an infinitely dangerous man, and you have given him infinitely more power; but yet," I said, thinking, "what can he do to us? He certainly cannot act himself. He certainly would not attempt violence."

"Why not?" asked Plangonev.

"How?" I asked. "How would he go about it?"

"There is always," said the Russian, "Comrade Hardman."

"Hardman—and Black!" I said, and started—skeptical, but shocked by the mere suggestion of a combination of these two.

Was this something, I wondered, that Plangonev had learned through his almost miraculous means of procuring information by the secret investigators he now had out gathering knowledge among the proletariat.

"Hardman and Black!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?" asked Plangonev.

"But Hardman," I objected, "knows nothing of Stephen Black in this. He believes that you and your work are financed by the proletariat."

"Unless," said Plangonev, "Black should have told him."

"Black tell him!" I said, and laughed at the absurdity of it.

"No?" said Plangonev. "Still it might be well worth looking into."

And he instructed me then to keep my eyes

and ears open—especially among the class of people with whom, on account of my previous association, he had always had me retain my affiliations.

## VII

THERE was at that time in socialism and its affiliated reforms a considerable and largely advertised group of men and women of the propertied class who had taken it under their patronage as a species of personal mission. They were most of them sons or daughters of men of property, often of considerable wealth—owners of real estate or mines, packers of food, investors in securities—which in turn they had passed on to their unemployed offspring, who were thus enabled to give their unbroken effort to reform. It was at these that Plangonev continually scoffed to me. “Amateur Saviors,” he quite usually called them, with his absolute disregard for sacred emblems; and sometimes, “the emotionally unemployed,” adapting an Americanism of the time which pleased him greatly. He laughed at them continually, and when I remonstrated and said they should be given credit at least for their intentions he laughed again and said

that was exactly what he did; that having nothing else of any consequence to do they had appointed themselves ex-officio saviors of the world.

“Away with them!” he would say, with his quick foreign gesture, when they especially exasperated him with some of their ex-cathedra utterances. “The rule of the proletariat will have no use for bourgeois emotions. When it arrives we will give them something to sob about.”

He derided them without end, and yet he used them continually too, through me, for one especial purpose—for information! They were the female element, he said, more talkative—the gossips, the sounding board of the revolution. They chattered, he claimed, unendingly—like the aviary in the park; and yet in that chattering, as he called it, he recognized as well as anyone there was always, from some source or other, some bit of news or gossip that was valuable. And it was my part to gather this.

These men in the inner circle of what Plangonev called “savoring,” which included of course the more wealthy of them, or those with

the more wealthy wives, gathered quite often at the house of a young millionaire—a tall, handsome, rather effeminate man, who smoked Russian cigarettes in a long holder, of which he had a great collection; who wore a very costly ancient ring, and almost invariably spats; the man whom Plangonev with his usual disregard of all propriety always designated as “the god in spats.”

With this inner set, as well as with this class as a whole, Honest John Hardman—“Comrade John”—had always close relations. To them he was a type, a heroic figure—an example of the hearty hardy laborer. His vulgarities, his continued partial submergence—even in the new temperate time—in alcohol; his mixed marital relations—were all typical to these amateur social students of the natural reflex action of the honest toiler escaping finally from oppression. Even his hired murders were understandable—if true! He was to them, in short, an oracle—semisacred; the slightly alcoholic voice of what they denominated the people.

Hardman on his side, though privately his opinion of these people was not amenable to

repetition, could not, naturally enough, resist expanding under their deference and adulation when with them—especially when more than usually in his cups; and he often retailed to them the purposes he had hatching in his mind; and before this time I had at the instance of Plangonev more than once found him overtalkative of our movements, and requiring repression, which he very promptly had and took most humbly from Plangonev, for whom he had up to that time a very salutary and chastened fear.

This time again I found Plangonev right; Comrade John Hardman had been talking again to his friends, the amateur saviors; and in a very different mood from what I had ever heard before. I ascertained this soon after, during a visit to the house of him whom I will call the man with the spats, where the inner circle were gossiping.

They were all agog of course, with the collapse in the stock exchange—the practical elimination of the common stock of great publicly owned corporations.

“It is the very thing we have been working for, for years,” said one of the leaders.



"Yes," said the man with the spats, "the culmination of years of effort."

"It has been a frightful mental strain," said the thin man with the very wealthy wife, his hand upon his forehead, "upon many of us, however."

The circle had made, very naturally, a specialty of the understanding of the new events in Russia—several writing and speaking as authorities on the matter—most prominent among these being a young observer in horn glasses, who had gone personally into the Russian rural districts and made there a three weeks' study of the Russian view, concerning the possibilities of which he was most enthusiastic. So they all knew something of Plangonev, both as a Russian and an American influence.

They had heard, of course, of the work of Plangonev in this country by this time, but merely as one instigating labor through Comrade Hardman in the West. There was no secret, especially among those directly interested in his presence and mission in America. But they knew nothing of the accompanying relations with Stephen Black or the fund of freedom, for these were covered up,

as I shall show later, with more than extraordinary care. In these people's minds the collapse had been brought about by their publicity and agitation and such allies as Hardman and his class—plus, of course, always, the support of natural social tendencies.

Yet they were not entirely at ease—some of them, even then. I thought I saw sober faces there, for more than one income of course must have been affected. Yet they were all, for whatever cause, under the stimulus of excitement. A great new matter had come into the world to be talked of. They considered the socialistic era now at hand.

"We must apply ourselves—all our energies," said the lean man with longish hair who sat back on a deep-cushioned English lounge beside the man with the spats, "to its direction in its formative stage." And the others agreed at length.

They had, of course, as I knew, much of their information of labor conditions from Hardman. It was a rare evening when he was not quoted, and that night it came out that from his predictions some dark and revolutionary thing was about to transpire—some-

thing, they brought out finally, with some few side glances at me, that would affect quite materially the real leadership in American labor; a remark which I took to be aimed indirectly at Plangonev. He might disappear, it seemed, before long to where he came from, so I learned finally, according to Honest John's mysterious utterances, no doubt made under a slight excess of exhilaration from alcohol. He might disappear, that foreigner—it seemed that he prophesied—some day as suddenly as he had come here. And in some ways, good riddance!

This was a new attitude for Comrade John, the honest labor leader, usually so friendly and subservient to Plangonev; lodging with him, in fact, quite often at his rooms—sobering off in quiet from his periodical debauches. I lost no time in carrying my information to Plangonev.

He preserved his usual fatalistic calm.

"Do you connect it with Black still?" I asked him.

"Why not?" asked Plangonev. "What could he not offer to get rid of me now? And what I know?"

"Not violence!" I said.

"Who knows? Why not, if needed?"

But I would not believe it.

"Comrade John," said Plangonev, "and his dynamite!" And he laughed.

"That is a poor jest," I said, shocked.

"So Comrade John will find," said Plangonev, his manner making that strange change which it now quite often made, from scornful fatalistic levity to a sudden seriousness which bordered on ferocity.


I did not at the time entirely accede to his suspicion, yet I could see there were excellent reasons for it. We had looted a continent, indeed, with these men, but there might be necessarily in the situation, I was beginning to see now, elements of physical danger over the division, and the concealment; for there must be, as there had been, most scrupulous concealment of such a tremendous spoil.

## VIII

THE necessity of concealment on the part of Stephen Black of his tremendous booty from the stock market will be apparent when the conditions of the time are kept clearly in mind.

It was now the spring of 1922, just following the first or preliminary closing of the national stock exchange. Our plot of debt was well on in its second phase. The hard-lipped pincers of government competition in industry on the one hand and taxation to pay its expenses on the other had closed about private capital in the private corporation, and all but destroyed it, dragging down, of course, a large proportion of its owners and the great capitalists who controlled great companies in its falling.

It was necessary now for us, as our second step in our plan, to eliminate the other members of the great bourgeois—the damned two per cent; or, as Plangonev now put it in his



hard way: "The main battle is well on; it becomes now time to go out on the field and kill off the stragglers."

Not all of the great bourgeois, of course, held their property in the form of stock of corporations. Some, aging, had turned it into underlying bonds. Some few held city real estate; a large number had and still held government bonds secured for railroad stock—though there had been a tendency among the very rich not to retain these. Some—very important ones—especially in the lines of metals, petroleum and food supplies, still held the great secret private corporations whose stock had never been listed upon the recognized public stock exchange. Some, watching this flood of government debt and taxation rising, had been credited with converting all that was possible of their property into actual cash. Against this supposed sequestration of great property the general public, egged on by means of every form of propaganda that we or the natural American genius for agitation could devise, was now in full cry. For government expenses were not lessening; the government debt was mounting; and the main

source of war taxation was now being lost or escaping entirely.

During the war, of course, under the agrarian party from the West and South, the war taxes had been framed; those happiest taxes, as Plangonev had termed them, ever devised by man—to be laid upon the property of corporations and the great incomes of the very rich, leaving at least ninety per cent of the population practically free. Of these two main sources of public income the corporation was being lost, and the other was fast disappearing; and the general population, now being threatened with being taxed itself, and taught in the past to regard the very rich with continual suspicion, believed that they were now escaping, through some new subterranean way, their obligations to the state. So the Government was sharpening the penalties of law with more and more drastic punishments to prevent this.

I often speculated on the position of Stephen Black. He was, of course, under a double danger now. For years by very skillful machinery he had kept the real immensity of his fortune and his income from all knowl-

edge—public as well as private; now if through his recent accretions his property and his income should be divulged the penalties he must pay, both in property and in person, would be overwhelming.

I touched upon this occasionally, but rather lightly always, with Plangonev; for from a natural personal policy I learned as little as possible of the actual financial transactions of either man.

"Where and how has he concealed it?" I asked Plangonev once, and it seemed to me that he rather avoided me.

"That we would all like to know," he answered. But, though I suspected at the time he had lines of investigation out hunting this knowledge, he said nothing of that phase.

"We do know this," he said; "it makes a danger hanging over him, which will not let him cease until he closes every means of approach."

"Meaning," I said, "us!"

"Why not?" asked Plangonev.

"And you still suspect our Comrade Hardman?"

"Suspect, perhaps," said Plangonev, "is



not the word." And I saw now by his way that he had no more information ready for me, and dropped the matter.

Hardman was now in the West, carrying out his familiar methods of a labor campaign. The strongest, of course, of all American corporations had been those great private aggregations which had especial control of the mines and meat and oil. These great secret strongholds of capital had no one knew what resources behind them with which to go forward with their work. On the other hand they employed always the rougher elements—the free labor, as Plangonev termed it—most easily excitable, quite largely of recent foreign origin, and already more than slightly touched by the kindling flames of the successes of the proletariat in Europe. Here was the obvious place to apply pressure on the more obstinate citadels of private capital, and here Honest John Hardman was especially strong. Up to this time violence had not been greatly apparent in our movement, in spite of my recent fears, but I could see its continual tendency to creep in. The daily press, I recall, one morning registered another dynamiting; a wholesale

hired murder of scab labor, typical of the method of that smiling *entrepreneur* of murder, Honest John Hardman; and I took occasion at that time to protest to Plangonev about it, reminding him of his promises of a peaceful revolution.

"They may deny it as much as they choose," I said, "but you know and I know it is the work of Hardman. And I for one protest that I shall not sit by and close my eyes or even wink at it. He must stop it—and at once!"

"I think," he said, "it will not recur."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Comrade Hardman," he answered, "if I am right, is already on the way toward eliminating himself from the problem; or so, at least, I hope."

He said nothing more definite at the time, but it must have been but a few days after this that he called for me to accompany him on another evening excursion.

"To see Stephen Black again?" I asked when I saw the direction he was taking. And I spoke with some surprise, for we had not been with Black then for some little time.

"No," he answered.

"To whom, then?" I asked.

"To see Comrade Hardman."

"To see Hardman!" I cried, surprised.

"Here!" For I had supposed him still in Colorado.

"Wait," he said. "That is what I desire you to see as a witness."

We progressed, nevertheless, till we came into the vicinity of Black's house—toward the concealed entrance on Sixty-fifth Street; and we were almost there when a man brushed by—whom I recognized as one of those whom Plangonev had out in his service of investigation continually.

"Soon?" asked Plangonev as the man sauntered by us in his long overcoat.

"Very soon now," he answered without slackening, and was past.

We sauntered by ourselves, and stood for a few moments opposite the end at Sixty-fifth Street upon the broad walk of the Central Park side of the street of the great bourgeois. It was a damp, unpleasant night again, with few upon the streets, and here was a point of vantage where we might stand relatively un-

disturbed. The street of the great bourgeois stood more forbidding and silent than ever before. God knows how many of those great imitation castles were now empty — three, perhaps, out of four; and the occupants of the rest, in all human probability, sat within in gloomy anticipation of the future.

We had not stood there watching more than a few minutes when a familiar figure appeared from the back-stairs entrance of Stephen Black's.

"Hardman!" I said at once, for there was no mistaking that big hulking shape.

"You see him now with your own eyes," commented Plangonev.

"With Black!" I cried again; and a shudder of personal apprehension passed over me, knowing the two men and knowing now that Plangonev had been cautioning me from real information.

"Why is he here?"

"Considering us, no doubt," said Plangonev.

"How? How?" I said, for I was now thoroughly alarmed, as much by what I saw he knew as by what I myself had seen. "How shall we defend ourselves?"

"It will be better, I think," replied Plangonev, "to leave the comrade to himself."

"To himself?" I repeated after him.

"Yes," said Plangonev; "it is better. Such cases often tend to self-elimination, rather than violent defense."

"Self-elimination?" I exclaimed, adding immediately: "Of course, anything but violence. And if you know—"

"It is often the way," said Plangonev calmly; "I only wished to show you for your own good; that you would be circumspect, for instance, in the disposal of your evenings."

And with that I had to be content. Plangonev in point of fact gave me his confidence less and less now, and indeed there was an effort on my part as well as on his against his giving it. His plans or the tendency he might be fostering for the elimination of John Hardman remained a mystery to me.

Plangonev's warning, however, was not wasted upon me. It gave me a tendency at least to keep indoors after nightfall—the knowledge that that smiling, hearty hand-shaking murderer was in the city; and as Plangonev with his better knowledge observed:

“Not uninterested possibly in extinguishing what information we may have, together with our brains.” No doubt, too, as Plangonev intimated, the man might wish to further some ambition of his own. All this at one stroke, happy to both his employer, Black, and himself. What he was capable of, both in treachery and homicide, our knowledge of his record well showed.

“But how,” I asked myself more than once in that period, remembering Plangonev’s intimation, “by what means will the man eliminate himself—without our action?”

I could see now that it was at least possible that my participation in this promised peaceful revolution had led me very quickly to the edge of personal as well as social violence—no matter how I might deprecate it. Both personally and for society I began now to have a deep sense of apprehension over the situation.

Yet, I could reflect at least that if violence were threatening to extinguish our knowledge, together with our brains, my danger would be in a way secondary to and probably, in fact, following that of Plangonev himself.

## IX

It was not many days after this that in the late evening I was roused from my writing of my daily record by the appearance of Plangonev on my threshold.

"To-night I shall spend here," he informed me.

"Very well," I said.

This, though not usual, was an arrangement that had been made before. And we went to bed finally, after general discussion of both the progress of the plot of debt and, not unnaturally, our own personal situation. But when in the morning I took from my doorway and spread open the morning paper I could not repress an exclamation of surprise.

"Look!" I called to him. "If you had been there!"

"If I had been—yes," he said calmly. And I stared at him.

He lived—incognito always—on the ground floor of his old tenement—an ar-

rangement that gave him easy and unnoticed access to his dwelling. A bomb or an infernal machine had been placed there—possibly in the cellar, but more probably by the side wall in the hallway—and had exploded, driving out the contents of his rooms upon the sidewalk. Fortunately, the account in the paper stated, there was apparently no loss of life; the other tenants were unharmed, and the owner of the apartment—a man not known to the neighbors—seemed to have been away, for no trace of his body had been found. The one feature out of the ordinary had been, the journal stated, that the explosion, with the going out of the windows, had filled all the adjoining neighborhood with papers—clippings of newspapers.

We were forced to laugh in spite of ourselves at the net results of the explosion—the scattering of the fruits of Plangonev's newspaper-clipping bureau over the adjoining neighborhood.

"The comrade must have been disappointed," said Plangonev with his usual phlegm, "at his accomplishment."

And he went down to investigate, leaving



me still wondering just how definite a warning of the danger he had had from his investigators.

The attempt on his life was, of course, much simpler than it would seem to one in other sections than New York. The use of explosives for private murder is not at all unfamiliar in the tenement district in the eastern-central parts of Manhattan where Plangonev lived. It was not in the first place a phenomenon unfamiliar enough to demand large space in the newspapers beyond the first day, especially as there was no loss of life. It was credited again to some recrudescence of the so-called Black Hand of the Italian population; and in a space of time incredible to anyone but a New Yorker the explosion was forgotten and Plangonev, still undisturbed in mind, was living in an adjoining tenement, this time in the highest story.

The attempt at extinguishment might, it occurred to me for a moment, have come from someone in our movement who might be fatuous enough to suppose that Plangonev held some part on his own premises of the great sums he handled in the freedom fund; which,

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of course, he did not. But very few, if any, knew of this, and I saw, of course, immediately that general explosion was not the way that any thief would approach a robbery, even if he had knowledge of our fund. And so as far as it went I could but see that the occurrence fitted in nowhere so well as with the theory involving Hardman, which I knew Plangonev and his investigators were working on with so much patience and almost preternatural lack of fear. No doubt Plangonev knew with much exactness the movements of our sinister comrade, Honest John.

I had another inkling of this black double game of shadowing. On the second morning after this I received a telephone message from Plangonev putting me on my guard—to the effect that Honest John would be calling on me in a very short time indeed, the matter of an hour.

“Do not be alarmed,” said Plangonev. “He will offer you no personal violence—face to face. You know that—or should know it from his past. That is not his method—if he can avoid it. But whatever you do—show no emotion or surprise when you see him—be-

yond your natural surprise at finding that he is in the city."

It was an easy order to be given. I felt so a half hour later when I beheld him entering. Fortunately I saw he had been drinking—and was in fact at the latter end of a thorough-going drunk, with which it was commonly said he always followed his attempts at murder; and I was ready for him with my modulated expressions of surprise at his presence in New York.

"I had supposed," I said, "you were in Colorado."

"I was," he said, "when I heard what they were trying to do here to the comrade. They telegraphed me, and on I came."

And as he said it he searched me with his drunken eye—watery with feigned emotion.

"I came," he swore with a hearty outpouring of horrid oaths in testimony of his manly feeling, "to find out who did this thing to the comrade. And when I do he'll hear from Honest John!"

"The comrade," I said, for that was what he always designated Plangonev, "will be glad to see you!"

I released the hand he was still holding in his soft, moist, ex-workingman's palm, after he had nearly crushed it to pulp. Following more cross-examination and probing of my feelings he spat me in full heartiness upon the back and started heavily for Plangonev's new quarters, to which I had already directed him.

I saw the smiling, friendly murderer go upon his new quest with mixed feelings: Was his coming really in response to some call by Plangonev, telegraphed on and forwarded to him from Colorado by a confederate? Was he drawn in by the power the Russian held over him? Had he really had a summons he would feel he must obey? Or was it that, now that indirect murder had failed, under the false courage of his debauch he now came forward, smiling, to make a second and more direct attempt to extinguish us—Plangonev first?

"You must keep me informed," I said to Plangonev when I warned him over the telephone of Hardman's coming, "whenever he comes toward me again. I must be in a position to protect myself.

"And you," I said, when he made no an-

swer — “why do you take this risk? Why not call in the authorities?”

I could hear his jarring laugh through the telephone.

“The authorities!” he said. “We? Now?”

Of course I realized too. That was one of the serious features of the situation. We could not, from our position, invite investigation. In a very real and dangerous sense we were outside the pale of law. We must defend ourselves.

“Do not be alarmed,” said Plangonev; “until after he leaves here at least!” And he closed the telephone.

I reflected several times that next day on the phase of his closing — “until he leaves here at least!”

And the next day it seemed he had not left.

“He still stays,” said Plangonev. “He is in bad condition after this last debauch. We are attending to him.”

Just whom he meant by “we” I was not sure — and am not now. I was in those new quarters practically not at all. Yet I knew that with his means now he commanded just what help he pleased, and just the type to suit

his exact purpose, drawn from the interminable variety of types in that inexhaustible human reservoir—the tenements of New York.

“He is no better,” he told me the next day. “We are forced to keep liquor from him by his condition. He is not so cheerful as when he first came,” he added. “He becomes restless when deprived of alcohol. He is almost violent when we are not with him. He must be watched.”

It was like a daily report from a hospital or a prison, I came to think, feeling a little surprise—yes, uneasiness—over the situation.

“Have you had a doctor?” I asked finally.

“Oh, yes,” said Plangonev briefly, and closed the wire.

## X

FOR the next call on me by Plangonev I was not at all prepared. It came in fact an evening or so after this, in an invitation to go with him again to the house of Stephen Black. It had been now some weeks since we had been there and I for my part had no idea our visits were to be resumed.

I conjectured rightly that it was not Black who had sent for him.

"No," said Plangonev, explaining. "There is a matter of special importance which will come up to-night that I must talk to him about, so I sent word to him."

I reflected naturally that under the existing situation he could demand at least an audience from the capitalist at will. What special knowledge Plangonev had of his affairs I could only dream. But I myself had more than ample to damn him in the eyes of the Federal law if I cared to give it out. So then we went on together to the house of Stephen Black. It

so happened that our usual secret entrance at the rear was under repair, and we went into the house that night by the direct and public way.

As we went in Charlotte Black came forth to meet us, her father not being quite prepared; not overwell, she said, though not really indisposed.

It seemed to me at the time that the young woman was never more beautiful, more alluring—nor at the same time more independent and inaccessible—than on that particular night. Her wealth was indicated rather than displayed in her costume—by the simplicity or even paucity of valuable ornament—lace or jewels; very little personal adornment indeed, but every single piece a gem, the highest of its kind. It was in her person even more, and in her manner—the quality of her skin, the poise of her head, the direct beauty of her eyes—that she showed both what she was and what she estimated herself to be—the most beautiful of all creatures, free, uncaught, who never conceivably would be captured but upon her own terms.

It was curiosity, I presume, that urged her



out to meet us in person — the fascination, possibly, of Plangonev, this monster from the slums, who attracted her by the very menace of his personality and the darkness of his knowledge — and more especially by the menace of his beliefs and theories concerning marriage.

“Now that you are a man of property,” she said mockingly, “as I am told, I suppose you will go on to the acquirement of more.”

“Of what?” asked Plangonev, studying her.

“Of a mate — a woman — a wife,” she said.

“That is not the property I desire — in another human being! I prefer free association between free persons,” he said.

But again his hard eyes devoured her as she went on, driven by that woman’s fatal instinct, always inevitably to use her powers — to tempt or even, in this case, to taunt. White, slender, delicate, beautiful with every accessory of calculated beauty, she played above him that night — consciously, it seemed to me — Ariel to Caliban — taunting this monster from the slums, secure always in her power to escape; and yet we know — or I at least am certain — that beyond the mere promptings of curiosity

there was nothing, no personal emotion which attracted her on toward her own doom.

It was in Black's private museum, upon the same floor as his office, that she held us while we were with her—a room fitted with priceless objects of foreign art of all varieties and kinds, such as, by an old habit—following no doubt, as some satirist has said, the parlor whatnots of their ancestry—the great bourgeois often gathered together in one room from distant. The priceless rug of the six medallions was there upon the floor, the great and wonderfully delicate Ming vase, and on standards or on the walls the angular art and Italian carving and the celebrated Brilliaux hawking tapestries.

In this particular case, it must be said, the assembly of art objects had been made congruous by taste—not only the professional taste of the collector and architect but the personal taste of the two women—past and present rulers of this particular house—the mother, and now her daughter.

She talked with us, Charlotte Black, in the museum for a comparatively short time. Then from here we passed through the silence of that muted house—heavy hangings, heavy

carpets, the forced and unnatural silence of the servants of the very rich—to the huge working office of Stephen Black.

Black had changed, it seemed to me, in the weeks since we had seen him, not for the better. He was not thin; in fact, his lower face and throat seemed much heavier, but his voice was tired and his mien seemed strained. An atmosphere, in fact, of strained watchfulness seemed to be about him. But more than all I then saw this curious growing change showed in his eyes; that bulging—that effect of fear seemed now intensified. In spite of his phlegm, his studied calm of the speculator and the life-long gambler, that look—that gleam of fright that was in his eyes—would not escape you now, no matter how unobservant was your habit. So poorly was he under self-control that he seemed to flinch—at least I thought so—when Plangonev first entered the great room.

“I have come to see you,” said Plangonev when we began the interview—again shortened by the orders of Black’s master, Doctor Tideway—“upon a matter you and I must face.”

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"What matter?" asked Stephen Black, gruffly and hoarsely at the same time.

"Our associate, John Hardman."

There was no change in the careful calm of Stephen Black—except one. It seemed at least that his prominent eyes became more prominent—protruded almost as you watched, in his otherwise unmoved face. He made no vocal answer.

"I was wondering," Plangonev now went on, "just what he meant to you."

"To me?" said Black, rousing and speaking in his ordinary gruff voice again. He was outwardly the same old unbending man once more, but that his strange appearing eyes betrayed him.

"Yes-s-s," said Plangonev; and I marked again how the Russian sibilants hissed in his speech with his restrained emotion. "We did not know he was in your acquaintance until quite lately; until our comrade, Reverend Todd, and I, perceived him coming from your door."

Black, turning now, found confirmation of our knowledge in my eye.

"Since then we know more," the Russian

went along. "Since then he has been with us much. He now lies in my rooms, not well! With his old trouble. We are keeping him in restraint for both himself and us—for fear of delirium tremens; for fear lest under the influence of liquor he may speak still more!" He gazed meaningly at Black. "And so," he went on, "he is not now well—not able to be here. I was, in fact, anxious somewhat for his condition when I came here—when I left some hours ago; and I promised," he said then, "to call up my rooms and see just how he was to-night, knowing," he said to Black with still politeness, "that you would desire to know!"

I was surprised there was no readier response from Black—from a man of his bold type and hard experience. He merely stared that dreadful stare—with fixed and bulging eyes.

"Now, if you please," said Plangonev, with an almost stage perfection of politeness, "I will see—concerning your friend!" He rose and passed across the room. In the corner, set in the carved wainscoting, was the private telephone booth of Stephen Black—used for who could tell how many market-shaking com-

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mands in his business life. To this Plangonev stepped and entered — while Black and I sat in a constrained and perfect silence. The seconds passed; and several minutes. We heard no more than the faint muffled murmur of Plangonev's talking. But then at last he appeared from the booth.

"Comrade Hardman," he announced, "is dead!"

"Dead!" I cried, springing to my feet.

But Stephen Black said nothing — sat staring with protruding eyes.

"It was a singular thing," said Plangonev, returning and sitting down again across the table, where he could look into the eyes of Stephen Black once more, "yet very simple. The comrade was violent, delirious, even screaming for liquor, which, as you know, he continually must have—even in this time when it is forbidden us. But now, by my orders," said Plangonev, staring into Stephen Black's eyes rigidly, "and by the orders of his physician," he went on presently, "he was deprived of it. For his own good. In my absence," the relater continued — "shortly after I had gone, it seems — the guard, against my

orders, certainly," he interjected, continuing his significant glances at Black, "left the room for a moment. There was there," he went on, "a quantity of alcohol, which we had obtained for use in a small spirit lamp; a bottle standing at one side on a table by the wall. This, it appears, the attendant left standing there. You see the rest!" he said.

"The rest!" I said, clutching the arms of my chair, for it came back to me—his intimation of the few days before—his prophecy of self-elimination concerning Hardman.

"It was wood alcohol," said Plangonev.


I could not repress an exclamation. I saw in my mind the scene—the foul-ceilinged little room in the old tenement; the cheap iron bed with its tumbled bedclothes; and this craven hulking creature, with glazed eyes, screaming for his liquor—sure as a chemical drawn to its affinity to find and drink in alcohol, in any form. And then the guard's absence—and Plangonev's—and the wood alcohol! Could this be—must it not be, my startled mind inquired, that self-elimination Plangonev had so explicitly predicted? And yet who could prove it—even I?

"It is wonderful, is it not," I heard Plan-gonev's voice recalling me to the scene, "how each contains within himself always—each living thing—the germs of its own self-destruction. He goes," he said to Black; "and you remain. Yet you too contain within yourself so many elements of self-destruction. Do you not?" he asked.

I could but wonder more—not knowing yet of course the full reason of it—at the small reaction that Stephen Black made to him. There was almost no response at all. And then the Russian passed along, with calm speech and threats intolerable in his voice. And I myself sat, fascinated, as apparently Black was.

"You, for example, make your plans," he said in that deadly even voice. "You conceal your wealth most admirably. In cash. In gold—so much of it. To leave no trace to government investigation for the tax on income. You conceal it so carefully—its making and its place. You keep it so much here—in this room where you can know."

And now I thought Black did give a little start at last.





"But suppose now," said Plangonev, sitting more erect, his cat-and-mouse manner gone in the twinkling of an eye—"suppose now, for example, the government should come to know of you, of all your illegal acts, of this fortune which you so lately made, and saved so much intact from general taxation."

And now for the first time—driven curiously by the lifelong habit of a trader and fighter of men—a reaction of self-defense came at last upon Stephen Black.

"Suppose the Government should come to know of you?" asked the Russian.

"Or of you?" returned the American, raising again his shrunken shoulders in his high-backed chair.


"Quite true," said Plangonev, smiling now—a smile not beautiful, showing his stained broken wolfish teeth. "And yet we differ so—in this as well. Let us look at it—examine now the situation critically. For you," he said to Black, "dealing necessarily with so many parties in the first accumulation of your wealth, it has been difficult at best—and most ingenious that you have continued to conceal yourself at all. And so it would, I think we

can agree, be correspondingly most easy to disclose your operations.

"As for me," he went along, "I at least have had transactions with but one—yourself. So you at least would come first—and then perhaps it might be you could involve me. Let us say," he said, "you did. There is still this difference between us; I at least have had before the experience. Prison life will be no novelty to me—or great danger. I am peasant; I am prison stuff. But you," he said—"ask yourself."

And that dreadful look—that look of terror in the great bourgeois' eyes sharpened once again.

"You know, certainly!" said Plangonev smoothly. "And as for flight—which you have canvassed in your mind so often, naturally—I would say dispassionately you were safer here. You would be too often seen after leaving, by those not exactly your friends. We had a saying in old times," said Plangonev, "among our house serfs in Russia: 'The eyes of the slave are never closed upon the master.' It is so also to-day with the proletariat and you! As you have seen to-night," he added.



And the slumped figure in the chair made no answer.

"My feelings, though," said Plangonev, "are that with proper understanding — with an extension of the understanding which we have already had — all will be well for both of us."

He showed, it seemed to me, in his calm — in his continuation of his cat-and-mouse manner, to which he had returned — the spirit of the half Oriental in his blood.

"I have felt," he went on smoothly, "from the first that ten per cent was too small a part of what we made together — of our mutual gains upon the stock exchange. I have felt that we should have, not ten per cent, but half at least for what we did — to add to our account — for our fund of freedom."

I gasped, listening. Blackmail in tens — in hundreds of millions! On a scale more incredible than could have been even dreamed before our times! And while I took in my breath I heard Plangonev's voice going smoothly on.

"But that certainly," he said to Black, "must be your decision — and not mine! I simply now show out the weakness of your position. You have naturally, as Comrade


Hardman, essential weakness; the germs of self-destruction lurk in your own situation."

There came from Black at this a sort of mumble, which Plangonev stopped to hear. I watched him as he paused. The gleam of happy hatred shone in his one bright eye as then, when no more intelligible sound came from Black, he passed along.

"Death unfortunately," he said, "as you know, awaits you all too easily—from many ways. If you should fly, perhaps! If you go to jail, with the germs which lie so long within you; even with the suspense of not acceding to my request—and what even that might bring to you."

He waited with me, watching now that frightful and now appalling change upon the face of Black—the sinking body, the sweat upon the face, but most particularly that look—those eyes, those dreadful fixed protruding eyes of a man who sees in his own mind the last degree of horror.

But while we rose to catch him he stood up; stood and waved his futile hands before his face like one who fights away an invisible swarm of insects from him.



"Death! Death! Death!" said Stephen Black, and falling forward lay upon the dragon-covered oaken table.

And as he fell—before we came round to him—the door opened and the long-faced doctor, the master of Black, came running through the doorway.

"What the devil is this?" he called, and hurried on to Black's side—where I was now, holding him from slipping from the table.

He was injecting something—some fluid from a small vial he had hastily produced—into the forearm of the now half-conscious man when he dismissed us and we passed out.

## XI

THE thing was on me—like the still persisting panting of a nightmare upon a sharp awakening. I could say nothing now in protest or discussion to Plangonev as he stumped beside me down the half-dead street of the great bourgeois. He himself was not more communicative. He treated me by this time indeed as a mere convenience, a piece of household furniture or, as he once said with characteristic bitterness, as a bourgeois does his wife. We passed up the street together and turned eastward at our corner—both wrapped in heavy thought. And we parted at my place of leaving with as little ceremony.


My mind in point of fact was held now with varied questions which I could not trust myself to frame at once for his answer. What morass of guile and indirection had I not plunged myself into in this hoped-for peaceful revolution? What violence, secret now and later very likely open, was not involved in the

general situation? My mind went on from Comrade Hardman to Stephen Black, and back once more to Hardman—to Hardman, self-destroyed, lying there, self-eliminated—accidentally. Or was it murder—murder of a devilish ingenuity, entirely safe, unproved, unprovable, as untraceable to any human cause as any open act of God; even incapable, I saw, of proof to my own self?

These things haunted me, all that night—the hulking, distasteful figure of Honest John Hardman, the class murderer, now dead, ostensibly at least by his own appetite; the unknown danger that might be in store for Stephen Black; the situation in which I found myself inextricably involved.

There was no sleep for me that night; no change in my thoughts in the morning. And it was with an intense welcome almost equal to my surprise that I responded to a knock upon my door and opened it to find there the silent and uncommunicative specialist, Doctor Tideway—that master of Stephen Black.

“Who the devil is this man?” he asked, sitting down and lighting up a cigarette. “What type of murderer have you got yourself in-



volved with to play upon a sick man's fatal disease?"

"Fatal disease?" I said after him, recalling of course now the older rumors concerning Stephen Black.

"You have seen it," he replied, "in action. You have seen its symptoms—its sweat, its staring eyes, its counterfeit of deathly fear. Not counterfeit for them, but real! A perfect type of the extreme case—the one that terminates in death through fear."

"Death," I said, "through fear!"

And then he told me—what I should have myself recalled—of the disease of fear—the Graves' disease of the thyroid gland, at the end of its extreme course.

"It comes, you know," he said, explaining, "from too great emotional stimulus—to women; to men under constant nervous strain, as this one has been under all his life."

He spoke in the cold impersonal manner of the doctor—considering the patient as a mere sequence of reactions between disease and restoratives—lighting now another cigarette.

"Often," he said, "death does not intervene this way. We keep them going years—as in



this case—by watchfulness, by the use of the preventive extract. But this man is too ungovernable—he's had his way too long. He has too long a career of unopposed imperialism in his nervous system.

"You can't do much with them," he observed calmly, "after all," and stopped, contemplating the end of his cigarette. "And at the end," he said, "in the extreme case they die practically of fear—eyes protruding, hands flexed, muscular rigor. They end up finally in a kind of fit of fear."

He spoke still with perfect coldness, and though with my memory and the images which his speech evoked I was depressed and infinitely shaken he saw nothing of it, going on his own professional way.

"It is especially bad for them—any such excitement at night, when the nervous power in the brain cells is low—when the batteries of the brain are well discharged," he said and went on in the spirit of pure materialism of the present-day physician.

I did not answer him.

"Who the devil is this man—this Plangonev, who follows him so?" he asked again. "I

know who he is in general," he explained. "But where does he get his knowledge—which Black especially conceals from everyone?"

I told him briefly what I could, my mouth still dry with my emotion.

"You," he said after a wait, when I was finished, exhaling a long-held cloud of tobacco smoke from his lungs—"you, unless I am mistaken—you must be at least humane."

"I hope so, certainly," I returned quickly.

"Keep him away, then! Keep this man away from my patient—if you do not want to be a party to a murder. Indirect—but certain!"

When he said this my very flesh rose on my back as I recalled again the indirect intangible elimination of Honest John that very night before.

"But," I said, steadying my voice, "I cannot control this man. He is much more likely to prove my master than I his. He will stop," I said—"will let loose this hold of strangulation, in my opinion, when he secures what he desires—and not before."


"He can have it—absolutely," said Tideway quickly. "I know this absolutely—from

what my man says. You can tell him so—you must! He can have anything—anything; but he must not see my man again. He cannot see him! For it is a disease,” he said—“this thing—without rime or reason. You fear particular objects—particular men—and at the last everything! Though God knows,” he added, “this man of mine has got enough to fear about—and all his class!”

We both sat silent for a period.

“I came to you,” said my companion then in his cold emotionless voice, “first of all to save him. First of all for my patient’s interest. As an ambassador, if you choose, with his knowledge and consent—you being at the present time the one chance, the one element of possible mercy in the situation that we can see. And you must tell your man just what I say. He cannot see Stephen Black—to put it baldly—because it would mean death to him. But I also come to you for another reason—personal,” he said, and stopped for a time, scrutinizing his dead cigarette.

“You and I, if I am right,” he said, “are in the same boat. We know too much—both of us!”



I assented warmly. "Much," I said, "that I would gladly now unlearn."

"But we are in it, nevertheless," he said. "For I take it that you can't get out. I know that I cannot. We are witnesses of this thing by necessity. But as witnesses," he went on, "we must not witness too much—for our own good."

"I begin," I answered, "to believe that you are right. Where is this thing going?" I cried, letting loose my grasp upon myself a moment. "Where is all this going to stop?" For that night of reconsideration and anxiety had made me very nervous, fearful of everything.

"I don't know," he said, "but it makes you sit up—what has happened now to these fellows on Fifth Avenue. All now but a very, very few. I am a doctor," he said, flipping off his cigarette and rising now. "I am not a political economist. But we are in strange waters, my friend—you and I and all our kind. We want to be careful they don't close over all of us."

He gave me his long cold hand and went out.

## XII


WHEN Doctor Tideway was gone I sat, I will not say how long — motionless, heavy with a sense of almost physical depression on me — reflecting on my present situation; my mind imagining again the dreadful events of the night before.

I reviewed the inception of the plot of debt, the great strokes of Black upon the breaking stock market, the now demonstrated conspiracy of Black and Hardman to rid the world of us, and finally the sinister triumph of Plangonev and his formula of self-elimination for his enemies.

And at that I gave a start and sat bolt upright in my chair.

“Where is this all tending?” I asked aloud of my vacant room, as I had of the doctor.

For a sense of recognition struck me now; I saw. This policy of self-elimination directed by the Russian, this dreadful Oriental fatalistic faith of his expressed to Black that all or-




ganic things bear in themselves the germs of self-destruction—what was this but the great underlying principle of Marxian socialism, which we were now applying to America, the inevitable drift of the civilization in which we lived toward disintegration and collapse?

And when that struck me there was added to my immediate personal concern the deadly chill of the sudden questioning of a man's entire mental and spiritual foundation in belief.

"Not that," I said aloud. "Not utter pessimism and pure negation. That is not our new freedom. That must be constructive. Not all disintegration—ending in utter ruin at the bottom of the slope. What will be next?" I asked myself. "What is it that must come next?"

I sprang up at once and took my telephone to call Plangonev—seeking to busy myself, no longer willing to sit there with my unprofitable thoughts. My next course of action was at least clear.

"I must have an understanding with you," I said to the Russian across the wire; "and that immediately!"



Very soon I found myself in his small untidy office, which led from the still more untidy room where his clipping bureau worked.

"I charge you with nothing," I said to him. "I think I can understand your position with regard to Comrade Hardman. You and I were outside the pale and protection of the law. It was very probably his life or yours—and incidentally, very likely, mine. And you would hold, I suppose, that you were justified in self-defense in the way you planned it, as much as in the shooting of a primitive murderer who was tracking you with a rifle through a wood. All that, I see," I said; "and I shall not be your judge. It would be an ungracious act at best from me, considering what you have just done probably in my behalf—the very saving of my life. The past is past," I said. "Let it lie. But the future," I said, my voice quickening—"that is different! Where is all this tending—with Black—with everything—down, down through indirection to death and violence?"

All the time that I was saying this Plangonev sat staring at me with a hard expressionless face.

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"You guaranteed me," I cried, "absolutely, against violence!"

But now the Russian broke into a sudden strident laugh, which I could see he intended to be both scornful and reassuring.

"Violence!" he said, "Will you never see?"

And I waited, watching him—his coarse-pitted features, his great head, his peasant's hands. And now the patient, somewhat irritated smile—the studied calmness of a teacher with a backward child.

"What do we do here?" he asked again, "in this country—your United States? We apply," he answered himself, "do we not, Marx's formula to America—as it comes now inevitably across the world?"


"Out of Russia," I assented.

"Out of Russia, certainly," said Plangonev; "following this war."

"Yes," I said.

"Does it stop? Does it hesitate? Does it show signs of halting ever—when seen underneath by those who know?"

"No," I said, and I shook my head, remembering, of course, the developments of the last four years—in Europe as well as here.





"And here," he said, "in this last stronghold of capital—this America of yours—do we not see—you and I—the law of Marx work always its inevitable way?"

I sat there silent, my whole mind accepting the soundness and the certainty of his statements.

"Till now," said Plangonev more loudly, "the end—the day is upon us."


"The day!" I replied.

"The day of Marx. The self-ending of capitalism!"

"And with no violence?" I asked quickly, still persisting.

"Violence!" said Plangonev sharply. "Why always violence? Violence," he inquired, now visibly more irritated, "to what end? What was violence for the workers ever? The tearing up of a few railroad ties. The destruction of a factory. Bah! What is that? A few hundred thousand dollars of capital, at the best. And no doubt death and misery for more workers.

"Why this?" he asked. When all round us now to-day we see, now coming to its last, the deep inevitable workings of the formula of



Marx—completing its own course one by one among the nations—and now here.

“Should we,” he asked sarcastically—“we, the proletariat—now at this time start to destroy the property of the bourgeois—the machinery of industry now certainly about to fall into the hands of the commonwealth of the workers? Or perhaps,” he ended with a sudden hostile stare at me, “you doubt even now the early coming of our victory?”

“Not I!” I defended quickly. “I see it everywhere plainly. He must be blind who does not now—in this country, as well as Europe. And yet,” I said; and started to say more, to ask more of the varied questions that came thronging into my mind about conditions of the impending change.

But suddenly Plangonev, pursuing as usually his own thoughts, laughed quite heartily.

“What?” I asked him—“what is it that you laugh at now?”

For his whole temper now had changed—from irritation to content.

“To see,” he replied, “how close it comes. How close now comes their inevitable end. And how they squirm now, recognizing at last

what is upon them, starting their last act of self-destruction."

"Who?" I asked, wondering, watching him and the pleasure in his face with a curious, undefinable sense of discomfort and alarm.

"Who?" I asked, watching.

"The thirty-five per cent," said Plangonev.

And I knew, of course, that he alluded to the smaller capitalists of the United States—the thirty-five per cent of our population who, according to Professor King's statistics, upon which Plangonev so relied, now, after the elimination of the great bourgeois—Plangonev's accursed two per cent—divided among themselves the remaining two-fifths of the former capital of the country.

"Is it not a spectacle for the high laughing gods?" exclaimed Plangonev, and himself laughed heartily again. The last of the bourgeois now fighting one another to the death like two shipwrecked sailors upon a sea raft, bound in any case to destruction, but bringing it ever nearer and more near. "Why fight—brothers?" he exclaimed, still laughing. "But no! They must—it is the nature of the times!"

"You mean?" I asked.

"What would I mean?" said Plangonev.  
"This move to split themselves, the thirty-five per cent, clear across; this move now filling all the newspapers to take over all the bonds of all other possible industries—following the example of the railroads."

"And save," I said, of course remembering, "the property of the small city bourgeois—the bonds and underlying capital which lie in their small safe-deposit boxes and their banks of savings and insurance companies."

"What else?" replied Plangonev.

"The real savings of the nation," I said; "not wind—like so much of common stock. Real savings—laboriously made."

"And the more bitterly defended on that account," said Plangonev, smiling.

"It would save them perhaps," I remarked.

"And so ruin the agrarians—the other half of the thirty-five per cent. The agrarians!" he said, and laughed as I had never seen him laugh before.

"A sad end," he said, "of their happy taxes, so carefully placed upon the two per cent, and their old foes, the corporations!"

"What?" I inquired of him now.

"What they see now — the happy taxes now rolling back upon themselves! And now — at last," he said — "if the remainder of the thirty-five per cent desert — you see?"

And I saw indeed.

"The happy taxes fall full weight upon them, the agrarians — the last of the holders of private property on the continent — as they were once the first."

And I started at the picture it brought up. "It is impossible," I said.

"Certainly," said Plangonev. "Yes. It is the last. They cannot alone pay their happy taxes."

"You misunderstand," I said, "what I would say. You do not know them — the American farmers — how determined, how obstinate; how individualistic in all their ways."

"Have I not said," responded Plangonev, "from the first that I knew them for what they were? Not radicals — as they themselves would say. Least of all! The epitome of all the virtues of property — landholders, savers of capital, nationalists, religionists — the very backbone of the capitalistic economy."

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"But taxes!" I said. "They will fight first! They always have. The word 'taxes' has been a battle call to our farmers from the days of Concord and of Lexington."

"They will fight?" said Plangonev, mocking. "How? Who? When they are the only ones who remain with any property that is not governmental?"

And I sat silent, considering, in strange disquiet and unrest.

"You see," said Plangonev; and he spread out his hand in that expressive Oriental gesture by which all things at last reduce themselves to their own negation. "You see," he said, "the end?"

"But," I answered, starting up, for the whole thing disquieted me to an intense degree, "grant that you are right in this—right as well as logical. There still remains the proletariat."

"How?" asked Plangonev.

"Their temper now—their strikes and general strikes growing worse continually since the war. Strikes which spread now—insistent on ever more and more—in face of absolute knowledge that capital has no more to

give them. And anger—growing more and more bitter.”

“But what,” asked Plangonev—“against whom will their anger lie—the anger of the proletariat, the great sixty-three per cent here—when they themselves control? Shall they fight themselves?” he asked, once more mocking me, “to keep themselves—their government, which they control by vote—from ownership?”

“Oh, comrade, Comrade Todd,” said Plangonev, rallying me, “how much you are a man of little faith in our own movement when you have so much faith in other ways. Your old specter,” he went on, “of violence haunts you still too much. Comrade, is it not so? I myself—I can still hope for myself there should be no violence. But at the worst,” he continued, “granted that your fears were right—what then? Would it change the situation one iota, as we see it? Would it change now by one dot the inevitable?”

And I made no answer—knowing none.

“Do we not know,” he said, “without a doubt—you and I—what now approaches? The end of capitalism—the cost of govern-

ment—the waste—the debt of every kind, that now, grown utterly unbearable, starts to fall, and marks at last that end?”

“We know—yes,” I replied in a low voice with a curious mixture of apprehension and solemnity.

“Then why desert us now?” he urged, now in a more lively and appealing voice. “Why quarrel now with what occurs on the very eve of victory—when your peculiar temper and your principles of peace will no doubt so much mitigate the perhaps natural harshness of the proletariat? As now, for instance, in this case of Black—and me?”

“Black!” I echoed, apprehensive of his way of introducing him. “The case of Black! Just what,” I exclaimed quickly, suspicion coming over me again from that dreadful memory of the night before—“just what are your purposes for Black? I must know them at once.”

“Meaning,” replied Plangonev, eying me, “should I murder him? Or rather, let him complete his own self-murder, like his capital; his own stock market?” And then he laughed.

I gazed at him waiting for his answer.



"Murder—no!" he said; and he laughed again, still more heartily. "Oh, comrade, Comrade Todd, how the American religious training predisposes to suspicion. Death of Black!" he said now, growing serious suddenly. "Kill Black now! Should I be crazy?"

"Crazy?" I echoed him again.

"Have I taken all his funds yet? Have I demanded more than he would have available at this time? Have I not asked for half, and no more?"

"No more—no," I granted him.

"Well?" he asked, and gazed at me.

"Well?" I answered, waiting.

"Can you not see yet? Living, he would be with us—our bank, our fund, caring with so much more expertness than we, for our fund of freedom. But always under us, by fear of death."

"Yes," I conceded, remembering, of course, my talk of those few hours before with the doctor. "Yes," I said, "while he lives we hold—or you, at least, hold always over him the greatest of all powers—the veritable power of life and death."

"Positively," said Plangonev. "Living, he

is for us; dead—he becomes what? One more corpse, merely,” he said in brief answer to himself.

The phrasing of his speech was horrible—I could not help but flinch from it. But its logic was unimpeachable. I could not but be reassured as to his purposes.

“To prove this more to you,” he continued, “I had planned to visit you to-day for this one reason: That I should not go longer to his house, for the present at least, until I should know his condition. I have no desire to stimulate his disease of death now—certainly. Quite the contrary. And I shall not go to the house now for the forcing of the new payment for our freedom fund—unless it is seen first to be wise.”

“Who then,” I asked—“if not you?”

“You,” said Plangonev, “if you will.”

And now, convinced by this last guaranty of good faith, entirely unsolicited by me, I felt certain of his intentions toward Stephen Black, and I related to him most circumstantially the visit of Black’s doctor to me that morning.

“Your plan has worked,” I said; “your


close knowledge of Black's hidden disease—however you may have obtained it—has pressed the lever you had hoped. And now he yields you everything we desire. His property as you foresaw is now in substance no longer his, but ours—our fund of freedom, saved for us.”

“You see,” said Plangonev with a calm smile and outward gesture once again. “Logic. That is all there is—ever. Not how we should act, but how we must. All—all in the end is inevitability. But now,” he continued, while I drew back inwardly from this brief statement of the world as he saw it, “you must start at once and make the way of the beginning of the new transfer of our freedom fund—as your doctor has presaged.”

“Of the full half,” I inquired, “that you demanded?”

“Yes,” said Plangonev, and gave me his instructions. “Some ten per cent, let us say, in gold. But most in his securities, his bonds.”

And I marked mentally the knowledge that he showed himself to possess even of Black's securities. Yet his decision concerning the transfer of them surprised me still more.



"Bonds! At present prices!" I said, wondering.

For of course even then—we were now, as you will see, at the opening of this last summer—all bonds had gone down unprecedently low, there being, with the government debt of every kind, such vast amounts to be absorbed.

"Yes," Plangonev answered definitely, "that will be best for this time."

I looked at him, awaiting further explanation.

"Before we are through with these," he continued, "the price of waste paper will be much lower, no doubt."

With that somewhat cryptic remark he dropped the subject, leaving me to conjecture what blow he was about to strike.

So far as I can recall to-day that was my first intimation concerning Red Friday.

"Shall I telephone the house now?" I asked, accepting his hint to drop the matter.

"The sooner the better," said Plangonev.

### XIII

I WAS fortunate in securing an immediate appointment at the house of Black—one which caused me some surprise. The doctor was engaged, it seemed, but Miss Black would be glad to see me, it was said, as early as my convenience.

"It would seem almost as if she had been expecting me," I commented to Plangonev as I left him.

"Why not?" said Plangonev imperturbably. "Someone must."

I turned and passed on alone toward and down the silent street of the great bourgeois. I was experiencing now a curious reaction—almost a depression—doubtless due in part to the depressing influences of the last twenty-four hours; but in part as well to a keener realization than ever before that the great change, the inevitable day of Marx, loomed now so close upon us. There was a sense of passing, of instability—the necessarily mel-

ancholy sense of the disintegration of a time — which after all was the only time I had known.

From the first of our movement, I reflected, walking on, I had been disappointed in the method of the approach — no matter how peaceful it had been or might be — of our long-hoped-for new freedom. It might, I still hoped, continue to arrive without violence; yet it was so much less joyous than, so much the opposite of the outburst of good will and happiness for all men which I had painted in my dreams of Christian socialism — this inevitable logical progress of the formula of self-elimination, of the suicide of a society by this inescapable law of Karl Marx. Even the empty houses of the great bourgeois depressed me as I watched them.

They stood, in the somewhat cloudy morning — these demicastles of the Russian's accursed two per cent — empty now, nine out of ten, with the long shades down in their blank windows; a street as melancholy almost, and as vacant as the deserted tenement village of a bankrupt New England mill. Only here and there a few familiar families, who held their income by some deep underlying lien on

corporations or government debt or real property, still kept their mansions open in the absence of their former neighbors. And I reflected what was now in store for this world-famous street and its imitation castles.

"In three months now," I told myself, "at most, they will all be emptied. In five years all gone—replaced by structures for some useful end; unless some few preserved for curiosity's sake as half museums—like old castles of the European nobles from which they were copied—to show to a more civilized age these curious folk—this strange excrescence of an extinct civilization that was supported by the labor of their ancestry."

And I started thinking then upon the individuals I had chanced to know—and the peculiar situations or methods that had produced their abnormal and unhealthy wealth.

"An evil scarlet growth upon society—yes," I said again. "No doubt. A situation now," I said, "no different in its essence from that our great-great-grandfathers saw in the breakdown of the feudal era in the French Revolution. As much, no doubt, might have been said for those other rulers then. Hard

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or easy, direct or crafty, forcers or tricksters, makers or wasters, men of power or mere degenerate's spindling offspring—no matter how they seized and ruled, or transmitted, or gorged themselves into a death of surfeit while others starved, they themselves were but the net result of the inevitable forces of the age that fashioned them. As we all are ourselves," I said, recalling naturally the tenets of the social science of Marx.


And with that a curious breath of doubt came over me.

"Who will succeed them," I asked, "as rulers in our new freedom? What type are the forces of this age fashioning to take up the new power?"

And I stopped in my walking for a moment.

"Men like Plangonev? Or Hardman?" I said aloud. Involuntarily I shuddered.

"I am full of doubt to-day," I said, and straightened myself up again and went on. And very soon I was passing up the steps of the lugubrious house of Stephen Black—that so-called family vault of the newspaper press, which I had now half articulately renamed for myself the House of Fear.





The big, melancholy door man let me in, more still than ever; and I stood again in the house's silence, now intensified to me by the knowledge of the oppressive sickness of its master. Fantastic, almost grotesque, it seemed, what Fate—or God's eternal justice, as I prefer to think—had visited in the end upon this man—this hard unscrupulous man whose operations upon the stock market had indirectly imposed upon society a burden often equal to a scourge of famine—now lying somewhere above me there, afraid of each new shadow on the wall.

I sat oppressed by thought and memories and the influence of the place, looking down and framing into speech the personally most disagreeable task that was before me—a mission I naturally would have much preferred to negotiate through the dispassionate coldness of the doctor than through the daughter of the sick and now—as we might possibly assume—slowly dying man. I sat there thinking, wondering a little that she should have appeared at all in the transaction, when I heard again, back within that muted house, the plainly audible sibilance of the progress of

Charlotte Black now coming out to meet me.

She was pale, I noted now — with a paleness almost as marked as one might have expected in a product of that sunless house; but very calm and self-possessed, and never in her life more beautiful.

Again—from the intensity of my realization of the closeness of the great change that was upon us—a conjecture went across my mind concerning the new time into which we were passing.

“Will our new freedom—with its new utilities and deeper thought life for its women,” I asked myself—“produce anything so physically lovely as this creature, devoted consciously to loveliness, with all the background and the means for securing it?”

And meanwhile, with the ease of manner of which she was such mistress, Charlotte Black had immediately taken from me the initiative in the conversation I had anticipated with such dread.

Her father, she assured me, was somewhat better now—though not himself by any means. And of course it would be impossible for him to transact business.

Into the difficult subject that we had discussed she led me with perfect ease and poise and no embarrassment. I watched her with a growing wonder of admiration, sharpened, of course, by my own thoughts.

She was more than a beautiful woman. She was, in spite of her — shall I call it imperiousness of manner? — that rare and much prized product of our earlier and less utile times — a lady. A thing artificial, of course, framed under the artificial circumstances in which it grew — the protection that the rich security of a house threw about the women of so many of the bourgeois. And, with a natural instinct for such refinement, this woman had attained to a high degree that frail and artificial nicety in those smaller, weaker feminine powers of manner and taste and physical appeal — the many more superficial arts of mere appearance — which now with the increasing intellectual and physical utility of women we must, I reflected, expect to see relegated more and more to the background. But yet, as we all know, arts very beautiful of their kind!

I watched her as she had her way with me, deftly directing the conversation. Her ease

and suppleness of address soon brought us to the point I had come to discuss—the transfer of the funds from her father to us—a matter upon which I found her mind strangely well informed.

“With whom,” I asked her finally, “will it be best that we deal?”

For I could not see through whom, in the absence of Black, so secret a transaction would be consummated. Some private secretary, perhaps.

“With me,” she answered definitely—to my very great surprise.

“You!” I had cried out before I thought. “And perhaps dealing with me,” I went on instantly, covering as I might my rudeness. “The only objection I might urge is that for my part in such a matter I should be a mere agent—and not a very expert one at that, I fear.”

“Then why not,” she asked, “bring in your principal?”

“Plangonev!” I blurted out in my new surprise.

For I had up to that time studiously avoided bringing even his name into the conversation

—realizing how repulsive, under the existing circumstances, the mere consideration of the Russian might naturally be to her.

To my great amazement she showed no signs of emotion whatever—even at the maladroit abruptness of my bringing his name into the conversation.

“I should think so, yes,” she said, now calmly planning the details of their meeting. “We should meet, of course, best in my father’s office, you using the private stairs. There would be no more danger of disturbance to my father than if we were in another house. You, of course,” she added, “will be with us, as in the past.”

“If you wish,” I said.

Not long after that I went out, with my messages to Plangonev.

I must confess I could not fathom the woman. How could she, knowing as she must the previous transactions between the two men, and Plangonev’s responsibility for her father’s at least dangerous condition, find even the ability of meeting the Russian—much less suggest it?

But so it was; the arrangement for meeting

Plangonev was made at her own suggestion; and I could only wonder and carry out her wishes.

"Frail," I said, "they may appear—women of that type and breeding; but this one has a strength of purpose that seems incredible. Either an unbelievable strength of will or a lack of sensibility equally inconceivable."

I waited now with more than curiosity—with a certain real suspense—the meeting again of these two so opposite creatures under the new and necessarily distressing circumstances in that house of fear. Never had they seemed so antipodal in the world—the height of frailty, inutility and protected beauty on the one side; of strength and directness and common fiber upon the other. Never was the contrast so deeply marked to me as when I met with them that first time, in the great dark carved room again, for the transfer of the great sums that were to be made through her to us for our fund of freedom.

"One thing you will understand, of course," she proclaimed at the outset; "no one will be able to see my father from now on."

"How is he?" I asked earnestly again; al-

ways quickly anxious as to the result of that night's conference upon him.

"As well as may be expected," she returned vaguely. "But still not capable of being seen."

"Why," interjected Plangonev; and he gazed at her with that now bold and open glance of appraisal and physical admiration—"why should we see him, when we can see and be with you? Why—so long as you and I can continue carrying out the work together—in harmony?" he asked, and smiled a curious drawn smile.

I liked his attitude toward her very little, and I warned him so.

"I?" he said with a meaning smile. "Watch her!"

And I did from that time on. She was a great puzzle to me.

And now began the drag and tedium of the mere transfer of that enormous sum—those tens of millions in money and securities—especially the great mass of bonds which Plangonev preferred to take.

Much of it was carried to my place, but most to his; and I was startled at the thought

of so much property with such slight protection.

"Suppose a fire should start," I said, expostulating, "in either place?"

He laughed, and even struck my back; for he was in high spirits now, higher every day.

"It will not be long now," he said, laughing. "Not longer than our Red Friday."

"Red Friday!" I repeated; for now, naturally, for sometime I had felt there was some big movement in the wind.

Yet this time, too, he put me off with an evasion.

"You had," he said, "your Black Friday in the United States; following your other, your Civil War, as you remember."

And I of course recalled that much.

"Why should we not have ours, we of the new freedom, our Red Friday now?" he asked.

I caught his intimation naturally; but no more, he evidently not desiring to elucidate the idea.

Our transfer, meanwhile, to our fund of freedom went on day after day in the office of Black. It was not especially exciting or spectacular. What was it, after all, as Plangonev




said, but the transfer of paper no different from other paper; an occupation as traditionally stupid as the work of a bank clerk in the immense modern treasure house of a bank? One-tenth of that amount in jewels or precious metals, I reflected, would have made a scintillant and alluring appeal to the imagination that would have lasted a full lifetime, where this sight merely tended into yawning.

But there was still another matter that would furnish me as a comparatively unoccupied onlooker an interest and great curiosity; and that was the attitude of the two principals in the affair—of Plangonev and the young woman.

It has been often asked of me since the event if there was nothing in the manner of Charlotte Black to give me a clew to what she was about—some indication of purpose. My answer is there were continuously and all too obviously signs of purpose—but of purpose I could not interpret satisfactorily to myself.

The first and most obvious of all of course was her prolonging of the work of the transfer. At first I thought I must be wrong; that her actions must perhaps be the result of inexperi-



ence in such matters, and consequent slowness. But as time went on it became perfectly apparent even to me that Charlotte Black was deliberately prolonging the process of our transfer. My thought would have been that naturally at the first possible moment she would desire to end the transaction and remove from her house that agent—that dangerous murderous blackmailer, from her standpoint—who threatened it in such an intolerable way. If so she should have ended her work at once. She did not end it. On the contrary she prolonged it. And there could be but one inference: She deliberately preferred to hold us—or, rather, hold Plangonev there. For very obviously it was not I she would hold or release, I being very clearly a matter of indifference in the transaction.

It was a strange and unattractive thing to see—this attitude of hers, as now I saw it develop. Upstairs—over us in the great master's bedroom of that dark house of fear—Stephen Black, still prone, still in no different strength so far as we could learn, held to his life barely through every artifice that wealth and science could provide—stricken down by

this man, his enemy, with as brutal directness as with a club. And here below, this enemy sat with Black's own daughter, chatting, laughing—yes, from all surface indications, still interesting her; attracting her, to all appearances, in spite of the disparity of ages and the yawning difference of their tastes and lives and training.

It was not alone the man's bold attitude toward the woman; with that alone I could have dealt; it was—I could not deny that to myself now—the thing he had first called my attention to, her attitude toward him. For as time went on and Plangonev grew bolder, rather than any shrinking, her own manner showed a coming out to meet him—the constant studied appeals to a man's vanity and pity and hope; the weakness and beauty of woman artfully appealing to a man's strength; a duel, a game as old as man, but never played, I thought, in more distressing circumstances.

The hints of Plangonev, the memories of the singular intellectual attraction he had seemed to have for her in previous months—apparently in spite of her tastes and will—came back to me. I would not trust my own obser-

vations of them, but at times, too, I could scarcely doubt them.

"If it should be true of her," I said to myself more than once—"if this byplay should be what it now grows to seem I would never trust a woman in the world again."

Plangonev, on his side, no longer talked of her to me—though several times after leaving her I saw him smile. The absence of his usual bitter comment on the cruelty and the physical loveliness of the women of the great bourgeois struck me as significant in itself. And I watched the apparent progress of their closer understanding grow with a most unpleasant mixture of discomfort and surprise.

It was the last day finally, when I had my last shock from it. We were getting together the last of the freedom fund and making up the last of the accounts, Plangonev aiding Charlotte Black assiduously in their completion. Plangonev had been more than usually bold in his attentions on that day—politer, so to say, than a trained bear; and Charlotte Black more interested and appealing. We were on the verge of leaving, when Plangonev's sudden reconsideration came.

"I shall regret much," he said to her, "going." And I noticed that unusually mocking smile upon his face as he said it to her, she smiling back at him.

And then as by an impulse he put the papers he was carrying upon the great center table.

"After all," he said — and smiled again that unpleasant meaning smile at her — "why should I go quite yet?"

And suddenly with an utter change in manner he turned toward me.

"You may step outside," he said to me in a tone he had never used before, "if you please. I have something to say to Miss Black—in which it will not be necessary that we should have the benefit of clergy."

I rose, angered by the gratuitous insult of his words and manner. And I looked naturally toward the young woman.

"That," I answered him, "will be, naturally, for Miss Black to say."

"If you will, please!" she said to me, intimating that I should go.

And I noticed that she was smiling at Plan-gonev.

And with that of course I stepped without,



into the inclosed stone corridor—the passage, ostensibly a fire escape, which led down to the secret entrance upon Sixty-fifth Street. If I had given away to my own instincts I should of course have gone angrily on. But remembering all the circumstances I deemed it best to wait.

I was there several minutes before the paneled door slid open once again, before me.

“After to-night, then,” Plangonev was saying, “I shall see you again, not before Friday.”

“On Friday,” she replied.


And I noted she was still smiling.

## XIV

I HAVE not so far dwelt on Plangonev's relations with women. It is neither pleasant nor necessary to do so after the recent and lingering discussion of them in so many parts of our daily press. Suffice it to say that from our established standards they were not good.

On the other hand it must be said for him that he never made the slightest pretense they were. They represented no more obligation upon either side than might have been expected from persons economically free who, holding the somewhat negative doctrine of free association, found themselves in social conditions like those Plangonev encountered in New York, where individuals were in a constant state of change and irresponsibility and unrest.

But, be that as it may, I need not say I never sympathized with him, either in his theory or practice; and it was with suspicion and unease as well as personal humiliation that I



found myself waiting outside in that bare white stone funnel of the secret stairway, while Plangonev discussed with Charlotte Black the matter, whatever it might be, for the private consideration of which they had so summarily dismissed me from the room.

I recalled as I waited—more angry always, and more puzzled—the expressions of their faces and the strange and unpleasant development of their attitude toward one another in the last few days and hours. And there came to me then of course above all else the look that Plangonev's face assumed so often after we had parted from her—that gleam, as I conceived it, which comes in the face of plunderers of cities; and his hard and yet admiring comments upon the cruelty and weaknesses and carefully cultivated physical beauty of the women of the great bourgeois.

All this had no tendency, you may be sure, to modify my natural personal sense of resentment, and I voiced my displeasure immediately we found ourselves outside the guarded door upon Sixty-fifth Street.

“What does it mean,” I asked, “in the first place? Why was it impossible that I should



be present? Are you," I said, my angry suspicions flaring into immoderate speech—"are you involving that young woman in another and more sinister form of blackmail? Are you using the potentialities of her father's sickness to enforce new demands—of a character I may not hear?"

And Plangonev merely laughed.

"Is it merely money—the legitimate business of our fund?" I cried. "Or is it—"

And Plangonev laughed a still louder laugh, nodding his head as he did so.

"Bourgeois," he said. "Bourgeois to the bone!"

"I mean it," I said; and I stopped now on the sidewalk and faced him squarely. "I mean just what I say! I shall not be deterred by mere epithets."

"Then I must tell you, I see," said Plangonev, still smiling, mocking me. "But come, let us go on. We may talk as well walking—without attracting attention standing here."

"What," I said, moving on with him—"what is it you proposed to her?"

"Marriage," said Plangonev with a most unpleasant smile.

"Marriage!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he answered in his most jeering way.

"Am I not fortunate?"

"Marriage!" I cried. "With you!" I was cold with anger, feeling certain now that he was flouting me.

"Why not?" he asked.

"And she refused you," I said, passing on, disregarding him and his jesting. Marriage with him of course was not impossible merely, it was inconceivably grotesque.

"Far from it," said Plangonev calmly.

I looked at him, confused now as well as angry. For I felt there was sincerity in his voice as well as jeering.

"You have seen her—her actions toward me?" he asked me then.

And a sharp memory of her recent conduct caught me.

"If she had wished—even just now—to repulse me or to avoid me even," he continued, "would she not have done so—by simply asking you to remain with us till I went? Instead—what did she do?"

I was silent, dumfounded. There rushed back to me of course the manner and actions

of the woman — her apparent appeals to Plangonev; to his vanity, to his pity and his physical admiration. Was it possible — this thing that he was telling me now, with now every apparent sincerity?

“Marriage with you!” I said again. “At her age!”

“Why not?” said Plangonev. “Could she not have married those as old and ugly in her own class without exciting comment?”

“Even then,” I returned — “marriage with you! She must know exactly what that would mean. She must know of you — of your life and of your principles.”

“She is certainly,” said Plangonev calmly, “not uninformed. As she would not be perhaps of the similar probabilities in the habits of a possible husband within the great bourgeois.”

I went on, disregarding his remark, questioning him.

“You mean to say,” I cried again, not yet convinced, “that she will marry you?”

“Not me,” said Plangonev tersely; “no.”

“Not you!” I cried again.

“Not me; no,” replied the Russian. “Am

"I a fool? Me?" he said, spreading out his arms to show his coarse and dingy person. "I laugh. She acts well, but not well enough. She will not deceive me so. She pretends—most warmly. But underneath she is colder than the mermaid. She marry me!" he cried laughing. "No!"

"What is it?" I said, regarding him now closely. "What are you trying to say—when you have just informed me she would marry you?"

"Not me. But luxury—money—safety!"

"What have you been telling her?" I called to him sitting up. "What means have you used to bring this about—this so-called promise of marriage you are speaking about?"

"Nothing new, nothing very unusual in her class," said Plangonev. "And nothing certainly but the strictest truth. I have but shown her plainly," he said, "our plans. The situation she will be in when they are all complete, when we have taken the remainder of her father's wealth; and the conditions which we must now expect after our Friday."

I sat now, with my mouth closed—waiting for his voluntary statements.

"You missed the key—that is all," pursued Plangonev. "It is, as to all things in history or biology, economic. The terms of future living. And marriage as they conduct it—the bourgeois—is concededly nothing less than the transfer of one property to another. For the marriage of convenience is not confined to the great bourgeois alone; it goes with property—with every little peasant's property in Europe."

"In Europe, perhaps," I cried, "but not here!"

"Oh, yes," said Plangonev. "Here too. They protest, and protest—your women. But in the end they yield—to common sense and prudence. Why not?" he went on calmly. "It is the natural and laudable instinct of woman—without support yet from the state during child-bearing—to seek property, the certainty of food and clothing when she most needs it. After all," said Plangonev with his hard smile, "they are human—women—outside of mid-Victorian poetry. They must eat, and clothe and feed their offspring. It is a not unnatural instinct."

"And with this one," he said in my silence

—“with this fine specimen of the women of the great bourgeois especially. Place yourself for a minute in the position of this woman. A creature of wealth, a thing made of money—as clearly as spun cloth of gold. Up to now, rich, useless, warmed and fed and cared for and beautified by a multitude of servants; almost incapable of locomotion upon her own white feet. Suddenly this emptiness yawns underneath. One by one the great bourgeois—these people she knows best—go sliding down into the abyss. And she herself alone waits on the verge of it.

“And so when I speak,” he said—“I! She, knowing, seeing with her own eyes where the money and power is now transferred! What more natural,” he asked, “for her type?”

I said nothing—turning all this over in my mind—appalled, humiliated and horrified.

“It is the same exactly—as her father. Why not? The same bait for both. Why should it be different?”

But I gave a groan—of horror and disgust.

“They disintegrate—the whole class,” said Plangonev, “by pure necessity, by the simple necessity of the law of Marx.”

"I'll not believe it!" I cried loudly.

"What?" Plangonev asked, surprised at my sudden outburst, the loudness of my voice.

"It is monstrous!" I said. "You!" I cried. "She marry you—the hunter, the possible murderer of her father!"

"The instinct," said Plangonev, now recovered from his surprise and again laughing at me—"the instinct of self-preservation is still a very strong one everywhere; even with the female."

"I will not," I said—"I will not credit it. It is monstrous—monstrous! She would be no woman. For a woman it would be impossible."

He only smiled.

"Law!" I cried. "Economics! Your law—your damnable—yes, damnable law of Marx would not so stretch its hands into a woman's heart—no matter what the necessity."

And Plangonev laughed a great laugh now—almost crowing with laughter.

"Oh, comrade, Comrade Todd," he said, "what blasphemy for a Christian socialist! Doubt of Marx himself! What a fury of



bourgeois emotion! Why not," he said, "if you doubt me ask her? What more simple? Why not telephone her and see if I am truthful?"

He was in such high spirits as I had never seen before.

"But now," he said, "if you were willing I could discuss with you something more consequential than the emotional reactions of women. I could tell you now of our Red Friday."

I listened dully at first—even to that! It affected me with strange and unaccountable poignancy—what I had just heard; more in fact than any of the more superficially astonishing developments before—this arraignment of his of the faith of our women. This sneering half jest of his upon the negation of the inexorable law of Marx of all our established and treasured instincts. It was a shock unlike anything that had come to me—not so much pain and horror as the sense of nausea; the sense which, I have been told, those passing through the experience of an earthquake feel at the undreamed-of terror of the giving way of the solid world beneath them.



But then my mind began gathering in the details of Plangonev's conversation.

"It hangs now—the whole thing," he explained, "by a thread; and a frayed one at that. Debt—dead capital—clogs everything—the banks, private industry, the Government. Debt! Debt! Debt!" he said, and laughed. "They support the staggering structure of credit now by main strength and combined agreements—hoping not to give it any shock. They will not sell, for example, or offer to sell, any quantity of securities."

I listened now, breathless.

"There have been no sales for months, beyond the little dribblings of small holders. Now we," he continued, "with this great mass of bonds in our hands, come out with them—on the market."

"The bond market?" I said. "The old stock market upon Wall Street?"

Plangonev nodded.

"And offer them down indefinitely," he said, "without rest."

"On Friday?" I said, seeing now.

"Why not?" said Plangonev, "remembering the traditions of the day; the chances that

it makes for advertising—in accordance with old superstition. So we proletariat,” he said, “shall have, too, our Friday! Red Friday—the end of capitalism in the United States.”

“The end of the world,” I cried, “as we have known it—according to the laws of Marx!”

And when I foresaw it—that long-hoped-for time—strangely enough a sense of terrible depression came over me; depression and distrust. How often I had longed for just this time. Now that it was upon us—looming over us, inevitable—I felt I cannot say what shrinking!


“After it—after this Red Friday,” I asked myself sharply—“what?”

I was far too agitated to ask this aloud of Plangonev then. I parted from him and went on home.

## XV

THAT was Tuesday—Tuesday evening, the 15th of August, 1922. I sat in my room alone, buried in thought, endeavoring with all my powers to realize the conditions of the impending change. I recalled to myself the more recent indications of intense bitterness among the farmers of the Anti-Confiscation League against the growth of governmental control and increasing taxes. I brought up the violent agitations now springing up among the proletariat of the cities for more and more governmental enterprises, if these would only give them work and food. And I strove to imagine what would happen if these so antagonistic forces should be thrown now suddenly into violent conflict.

I strove in vain. Overtaxed perhaps by the emotional experiences of the hours before, my mind refused to envisage the possibilities of the situation. I merely experienced an over-



whelming sense of apprehension and alarm and helplessness, which I could not shake off and which even pursued me into my late-taken sleep.

"One thing I can do!" I told myself before sleeping. "That is to prove or disprove the statements of Plangonev concerning Miss Black. At the risk of possible rebuff, I shall certainly offer my services to her in case I may be of assistance to her in this matter." For the more I considered it, naturally, the more preposterous it seemed—the idea of marriage or promise of marriage given by her to him.

It was growing warm that night. I slept badly and woke soon and quite early. As soon as it was seemly I called over the telephone for Miss Black at her house.

"Miss Black," came back the answer finally from her secretary, "begs to be excused from answering Mr. Todd's calls permanently."

What could I infer from that—beyond the crushing personal repulse to me? But one thing. She was not only satisfied with the conditions as they were, but she definitely warned me not to interfere. I sat, bowed down both in personal pride and in spirit by

this turn of affairs, staring into the telephone transmitter until the central rang a bell of protest in my ear.

With that I straightened myself up and resolved to dismiss the woman from my mind. There were larger things to be considered at this time, I told myself—accepting bitterly Plangonev's attitude—than the emotional faith of woman, no matter how we might idealize it. I got up now, and determined to seek Plangonev at once and demand a further outline of his expectations and plans—not for Red Friday, but for what would come immediately afterward. I then set out at once upon my way.

It was an August morning in the New York slums, that time of immense and sodden discomfort, when the peculiar, heavy sea atmosphere of the place hangs like a blue-gray pall over the city, and rests, a stifling burden, upon the great East Side, heavy with the indescribable close odors of human occupation, plangent with the sound of human life in a nervous state that borders upon pain—the hoarse cries of hucksters, the shrill complaints of ailing and uncomfortable children, the

coughing and shuffling of the old and wiggled and bowed upon the streets. In the midst of this I found Plangonev by his open window in his upper tenement, cheerful to a degree I had never known before, reaching out to me, willing as never in the past to explain the situation we were approaching; and starting, in fact, with evident relish, to recall the development of our plot of debt from its beginning.

"Our problem," he said, smiling reminiscently, "was a very interesting one. We had here a country non-socialistic to the core, individualistic to the last degree, touched least of all by the waste and destruction of capital which was incident to the great war. A stronghold, certainly, of our enemies.

"What should we do?" he asked analytically. "Should we start a propaganda of socialism, through what socialists there were then—a few extreme and recent foreigners, of specially disregarded races? Or your amateur saviors, perhaps?"

I sat, returning the humorous glance he turned on me with this question.

"A hundred years," he made answer to

himself — “no less!” And laughed and waved his hand.


“What then?” he asked, turned serious again. “What was there? What but the means we possess here in the native population for the promotion of the Law of Marx — the destruction of capital in every way — followed, of course, by its collapse and our new freedom?”

“You worked out, in other words,” I contributed, “our plot of debt.”

“Yes,” said Plangonev, “with what tools were native to the population.”

He stopped, considering, and the clangor of the heat-tortured street underneath filled up his silence as he calmly thought.

“The theory,” he went on then — “that was simple — the destruction and assumption of private, or more often corporate, property by popular vote; through government waste and expenditure and competition in industry, and then taxation. There is nothing new in that. It is perhaps a century almost since your Chief Justice Marshall told you that the power to tax is the power to destroy. The theory was well known,” he reiterated, thinking.



"Yes. But what—who were those here who were the most useful agents for us?"

"Who were?" I inquired, in the pause while he stopped to ruminate.

"The free labor for one thing, certainly," he replied finally—"the wild, unorganized or lately organized labor—especially in the West, where it is most highly paid and least married, and so most independent and strongest, naturally, both financially and socially, to fight."

"Yes," I said, prompting him to go on.

"And then, certainly," he said, canvassing always the matter most carefully, "the Agrarians, or, let us say, the leaders of the Agrarians, lashing their natural prejudices against the corporations into wildness.

"And then, certainly," he continued judiciously, "the city politicians, always and forever grinding out gratuities for themselves and their followers, by their same old popular receipt of confiscation of the property of the rich by public waste and taxation."

"Is that the last?" I asked him when he paused.

"No, not yet," he answered me. "No, after all, we must not forget that great new agency



of the cheaper American press, which depends upon the excitation of the proletariat for its circulation."

And I moved uneasily when he said this.


"We must not underestimate, certainly," he went on, "the aid that these have been to us in the destruction of capital in the United States, making perhaps the most obvious and noticeable instrument of all. And especially," he said, reflecting, "in those cases where the proprietors—not recognized politically in society as it exists—have an incentive to cause social disintegration, either in war or peace, to a point where the proletariat will accept them as their elected leaders."

And now I sat upright, for he was coming now to the point of immediate interest to me.

"Who," I said quickly, "who after Red Friday will be the leaders of the new freedom? To whom will the great new power of governing fall?"

And Plangonev looked at me with a mocking smile.

"Would it be your friends," he asked—"the amateur saviors of society?"



And in spite of my urgent concern, I now laughed myself at the humorous look on his face.

"No," he said briefly; "we shall use others probably!"

"Who?" I insisted. "I cannot see who there is now in sight who is competent to control."

"Should we have a miracle," asked Plangonev, "by Jehovah, like the ancient Hebrews, manufacturing us from nothing now a leader? No," he said thoughtfully, "we will use what we now have."

"What?" I inquired.

"Who but those who have now appointed themselves?" asked Plangonev, evidently enjoying my excitement. "Who but those now in control? At Washington, naturally, your bureaucrats, who now run your railroads and your telegraphs."

"Those!" I said. "Those who now take a week to send a letter or express package, where formerly it took a day!"

And I sat up, alarmed at the suggestion. But Plangonev smiled back at me broadly.

"Can you expect more, in executive work,"

he asked, "from lawyers taken from the agrarian districts, and their political friends?"

"And who else," I asked, pressing him—"outside of Washington?"

"Who else—in the cities—but the city political leaders, who have had your city contracts. And certainly the daily press of the proletariat, who have considered this change so deeply, and urged it both directly and indirectly so well."

"These!" I said. "Will these have control of us," I said, stammering, "after—after our Red Friday?"

"Why not?" said he. "They are the ones, are they not, the movement has raised up?"

"Those," I said, "our leaders, both governmental and economic! After Friday—the day after to-morrow!"

"Why not?" Plangonev asked again, and gazed down, through the dilapidated fire-escape into the noisy, reeking street below.

"Answer me," I said, standing up, calling out, in spite of the heat of the day, in spite of my wilted collar and the perspiration rolling down my face. "Answer me this! You know, of course," I said, collecting myself, "of the

Anti-Confiscation League among the farmers—how ugly it grows in the South and West against government waste and operation and taxes?”

“So I have heard,” said Plangonev; “so I believe.”

“And inside the cities the proletariat, uglier and uglier, demanding work and wages where there is neither?”

“Yes.”

“What then?” I cried, staring. “What will come immediately after your Red Friday, your collapse of capital? What crisis will occur?”

For this question, which had been a growing torture to me for days, had now become intolerable.

“In what way?” inquired Plangonev calmly.

“What will happen,” I cried, “with universal bankruptcy? The banks gone, the corporations stopped, every little private store-keeper even without money! What will occur?”

“There would still be,” said Plangonev, “your government, operating the railroads and the telegraphs and the ships.”

"But food!" I cried. "Here in the city of New York alone! For they say a city like this is less always than a week from starvation. How will they feed it? How will there be the means even to buy food?"

"That," said Plangonev, "does threaten to be our next grave question." And an evil humor gleamed now clearly from his eye.

"With this unrest there is now," I persisted — "with this present temper of the proletariat, so often lately out of work—what will there be? What will these do if they lack actual food?"

"Your friends will find means to provide it legally, no doubt," responded Plangonev; "your managers of your departments at Washington, under the new rights growing out of the great war and since, under our plot of debt. They and the proletariat press have already no doubt worked out the theory of such action under the advice of your theorists—your amateur saviors."

And at that I gave a gesture of distaste and anger.

"That is not my question," I cried. "I asked not of the powers these men have taken

or will take. There is small doubt that they will find methods to take them, as in the past. But where," I cried—"where will they actually find food for those who lack it?"

"They will take it, also, perhaps," said Plangonev.

"Take it!" I exclaimed. "From where?"

"From where it is, no doubt," the Russian answered. "From the farmers ultimately."

"The farmers!" I cried, more loudly even, if that was possible. "The Government take the property of farmers now, in face of this Anti-Confiscation League excitement; when any unexpected spark may send our national situation flaring into open violence!"

"Why not?" asked Plangonev indifferently.

And I looked at him, watching him now with a continually sinking heart.

"Unless," he went on deliberately in my silence, "it may break earlier—in the cities."

"What?" I asked, my voice now shrill with apprehension.

"Violence," he said. "Rioting in the cities, in the absence of food for the proletariat. As in Petrograd. Hunger," he concluded, as I stared at him, "is a very urgent thing."

My heart stood still. I was cold even in that intense heat.

"Violence!" I stuttered. "Petrograd!"

"Without doubt," said Plangonev. "Unless, unlike in Petrograd, your rulers will act vigorously and quickly."

"They!" I said, my breath returning. "Those caterers to the mob! Those supine servants of the mass! Those grotesque slaves of the voice of the cheap newspaper!"

And at that he laughed aloud at me. I stood straight before him, accusing him, for I realized now entirely—not more from his words than from the expression of his face! I saw now he was playing with me, in sheer natural joy of torture, as a cat with a mouse.

"You mean, then," I said, calming myself, "in spite of all you have promised me, that you look for violence?"

He laughed outright.

"Who," he asked, and looked at me with that devil's smile of his—"who but a pacifist could conceive of revolution without any violence?"

"Then," I said, and gazed now straight into his eyes, "you lied. You lied to me!"

"Why not," he inquired calmly, "to a pacifist?"

I could have struck him — struck him down. But I withheld myself. I must strive now, I saw, as my next duty, to catch a glimpse of what was now upon us.

"And after this," I demanded, "after your Red Friday, if these present officials fail — as you and your confederates confidently expect they will?" I said, and gazed directly into his eyes.

There was no gesture of denial now, nothing but that set, scornful smile.

"As you expect they will," I repeated firmly, reiterating my charge. "For you planned this too," I said, "from the first! Who," I asked, "when these have failed, will inherit the new power that will surely drop from these weak hands?"

"Why not as in Russia," asked Plangonev — "exactly? Why should we not have here in America, as our Lenine has once said, 'to go for power always deeper and lower in the proletariat?'"

"To you!" I said. "In other words, it will fall to you, and your Bolshevik associates,



manipulating always the most violent and least educated elements of the population."

"The most oppressed," Plangonev corrected, watching me.

"You fiend!" I cried. "You planned this from the first. You not only made this situation by your plot of debt, you stimulated always rancor and distrust and want. You timed your catastrophe, your Red Friday, deliberately, when it would lead to violence. You set the devil loose in this devoted country," I said, "dancing to the chants of spellbinders, upon a settled date, upon next Friday. And then you expect, following that, to take the whole thing over in your hands, by long-planned and deliberate treachery of your confederates!"

"Confederates," repeated Plangonev calmly, his keen pleasure in my excitement not abating. "Confederates. No, only in part."

"Only," I answered, "as far as you choose to make them."

"You do me too much honor," said Plangonev. "It is nothing which I have done, but direct the natural forces. It is like chemistry merely," he went on, employing his familiar

simile. "When the elements are there, we should mix them merely, and the new reaction, the new precipitation, shall take place inevitably."

"As in your accursed, degenerating Law of Marx," I cried, beside myself.

And he laughed now gleefully.

"And then," I said, catching myself again, "what then? Will that stop violence, or tend to, when you secure your desired control?"

"Not," said Plangonev, "if the bourgeois still desire it. Or the farmers."

"Desire it?" I said.

"As in Russia—defending their former property."

"And how long," I said, restraining myself with a supreme effort—"how long would you conjecture such a reign of terror once begun would last?"

"How should we know?" asked Plangonev. "As our Trotzky has once said: 'What even if it should take fifty years?'"

"Fifty years!" I cried, aghast.

"What is fifty years," queried Plangonev, "in the life of the race? But still," he conceded, "it may be shorter, as in the French

Revolution. Perhaps all within a decade. Yet history shows us we should not expect too much. The new fermentations of society are slow in settling, as any social scientist knows."

And now once more I felt my self-control slipping.

"You monster!" I cried. "You monster of science and logic! You foresaw this always from the first. Violence!" I cried. "A reign of terror, lasting decades!"

He merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall revolt!" I cried. "I shall renounce you publicly!"

"Why not," said Plangonev, "now it is all inevitable?" And rose and turned his back toward me.

I turned and stumbled down the dirty stairs into the shrieking, stinking, heat-smitten August street.

## XVI

I WENT out, shaken, and I wandered, dazed, often muttering to myself, once or twice even overturning children as I strode through those horrid crowded, superheated streets. Finally, when I cared to look, I found myself on the far East Side, well toward the East River, and I was compelled to turn back and retrace my steps to the Bowery and the Third Avenue Elevated in that intense heat. I was all but exhausted when I reached it, and though I cooled my scarlet face, and reduced my throbbing pulse beats somewhat, in the breeze of my transit uptown, yet when I finally reached my quarters I was almost prostrated. A raging headache held me, with a not unnatural fear of heat exhaustion. Try as I would, I could neither think nor act. There was but one thing for me to do. I took to my bed, and finally sleep intervened upon my physical misery. It was night before I awoke again, and leaned

out of my window to see a city asleep—or struggling to sleep in the heat. I went back and falling heavily on my disheveled bed, passed once more into a half stupor.

It was midmorning before I awoke again, rather weak, but now free at length from my intolerable headache. And I started up, alert in an instant, realizing, as one often does upon a sudden awakening, my situation with a cruel clarity.

It was now Thursday, the very day before Red Friday. The country hung teetering above a financial and social abyss. If anything could be done, any warning sounded, it must be at once. And by a strange irony of fate, it was my sudden and unaccustomed task to do it—I, the least executive of men!

How should I proceed?—that was my question. Little as I knew, I saw that any warning must be given properly or not at all, for clearly any general public alarm of approaching disaster would produce exactly the effect Plangonev wished by just so many hours earlier. I thought and thought, but I could not devise a practical plan, or recall any proper advisor as to one. In the older days, before

the vanishing of the dwellers in the houses of Fifth Avenue, there would have been many to whom I could have turned for guidance on such matters of finance; but just now, with the disappearance and scattering of the great bourgeois, I could not think of one person to advise me that I could locate.

It came to me finally then, as a last resort, that somewhere in the ranks of Plangonev's amateur saviors I might find the way to assistance. After all, there were those among them who had been wealthy men, with an acquaintance, at least, among the financiers; and, with so many of them expressing their ideas in writing, some must certainly have access and acquaintance with government officials, both national and local, to whom they could direct me for assistance and advice.

So I seized the telephone, and called up at his new quarters the one whom I could feel fairly certain to find at home—the Man With the Spats.

“Why not,” his attractive and resonant voice called over the wire—“why not come down this afternoon and go over it with us at tea?”

"But this," I said, "is a matter for immediate action!"

"Oh," said the amiable Man With the Spats, willing always to act if he only could. "Oh, I didn't know. But the crowd will not be in until then, and I can't get to them earlier. What would you suggest?" he queried.

Advice being what I was seeking at the moment, I was not especially competent to give a suggestion.

"Very well," I said at last, "I will be down, unless I find some other means of working out my problem."

"Glad to see you anyway," said the agreeable Man With the Spats.

And I sat back, trying to conjure up some other way out of my difficulty; some proper means of denouncing and preventing Plangonev's final consummation of our plot of debt, and its certain harvest of violence upon which he was counting.

I telephoned several persons, but—it being the height of the midsummer season—without locating them. And finally, after a considerable expenditure of nervous energy, there was nothing so practicable, in my sight at least, as

to wait for the amateur saviors' gathering, naturally now with diminishing expectation of solving my problem. They might, perhaps, refer me to someone whom I could see that evening.

"Yet, after all," I asked myself, in an excess of physical weakness and pessimism, "what could anyone do to prevent the disaster now?"

And so finally in the afternoon I turned toward Washington Square.

They were gathering now, these people, I have neglected to say, in a different section of the city than previously. The income of the wealthier ones having very largely declined — if not almost disappeared — with the general downfall of large wealth in the country, these had now adopted the habits and the residential section of the less wealthy of former days. The meeting-place was still in the quarters of the Man With the Spats, but these were now in the vicinity of Washington Square, in an old house, where several of them lived, in a sort of semi-coöperative, semi-studio housekeeping.

A large dark room, with large pieces of furniture preserved from the former mansion, a



large table for current unillustrated periodicals, a large fireplace, about which to talk on winter evenings, and brackets upon one wall for the display of the host's unique collection of cigarette holders—these formed the salient features of the new quarters of the Man With the Spats.

When I arrived I found already there a fair-sized gathering for the usual afternoon tea, and the young observer of Russia with his horn glasses, again talking upon the social influences and characteristics of the Russian mir.

“It is crude, of course, as might be expected of a crude and wonderfully naïve people,” he explained, “but I hold and always have held that the mir contains potentialities, a possibility of fundamentals, which has been missing in our hurried, thoughtless, rapacious Western civilization!”

While he was speaking I noticed some lack of attention and sympathy. Some members seemed merely distraught, as if reverting to their financial troubles—which practically all now had; some seemed impatient—chief among whom, I noted the rather plump woman, the formerly very wealthy wife of the

man with the longish hair. She was a stoutly built, rather determined woman, whose father had made much of his fortune as a contractor of railroads; and I could see, as the speaker went on, she was in small sympathy with him, her foot tapping nervously on the floor as she busied herself with her sewing.

I felt myself almost as much impatience, awaiting the opportunity to speak to different ones about my problem. My plan had been to detach one and then another of the better informed and ask for their advice as to persons I might see to help me to head off the disaster of the next day.

This, I could see more and more, was going to be difficult, as I heard the young speaker go on engaging the attention of the small company with the possibilities of the mir—the chances of that ancient communistic scheme of landholding offering possible hints of a solution to our now acute and angry situation among the Western and Southern farmers.

Then any privacy of discussion on my part with any one member of the company was finally rendered entirely impossible by the Man With the Spats, who announced in an inter-

lude of the discussion of the mir that I had a matter of great immediate interest that I wished advice upon. I was unable now to avoid, no matter how much I desired it, making my mission common property. And I explained in outline then our plot of debt. I had not gone far before I saw I had excited one sympathizer.

"That is it," said the man with longish hair, with his hand again at his temple. "That explains it all—I could not doubt some hidden influence was at work. I have said so many a time, have I not, Adelaide?" he asked his wife.

She looked up at him, but did not answer, merely tapping with her foot.

He was almost over-enthusiastic. On the other hand, I could feel an atmosphere of skepticism gathering about me. The wife of the man with the longish hair continued tapping with her foot on the floor, in a disconcerting and hostile manner. Several questions of doubt were asked me as I proceeded, and finally the man with the warlike beard, who was there that day, interrupted in his usual somewhat brusque manner.

"Do you believe this?" he inquired, looking me directly in the eye—"this story you are telling us?"

"I would scarcely be at the effort of relating it to-day, in my condition," I said, with some resentment, "if I did not!"

"Then you have been deceived, imposed upon," he exclaimed in his usual positive manner. "The formula of Marx would certainly not work in that way, I am sure of it. I know Kautsky well; I have spoken with Bebel, I have seen Frederick Engels and I believe I understand Marx' expectations, as well as any man—in this country at least."

"Possibly," I said, "but I am telling you now of what actually happened."

"You're telling me," he stated firmly, "of what you now expect. Of what this man has told you. I have known men of this kind over all the world. You cannot trust them. They are charlatans. And as for this Plangonev—" he said, when I stopped him.

"I came here," I said, "not to ask your contradiction. I came to ask your coöperation—about whom to see to stop this thing, what stock-broking authority or political agent. It

is not worth while," I said, "for me at this time to enter into debate upon what I know."

There was, when I said this, a most disconcerting silence, during which the Man With the Spats, with his usual amiable intentions, came over from where he had stood, selecting himself a new cigarette holder.

"Do you really mean this?" he asked me in his kindly voice. And I was struck cold by this further proof of disbelief of my story. "Because if you do," he said heartily, "I accept it—and agree with you." The rest were stolidly silent. "And you expect, I take it, great and immediate violence," he went on.

"I do," I said briefly.

"Yes," he nodded, smiling, "I can see. And you wish to find some authority to prevent it?"

"There is none—possibly!" said the man with the martial beard. "How could there be?"

That struck me sharply. For, of course, that had been my great problem—that I could not seem to solve.

"No government authority certainly," said the man with the longish hair, "could interfere,

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against such a hazy, indirect, indeterminate threat of violence!"

"There might," I said in desperation, "be some financial authority."

"And yet," said the Man With the Spats, thinking, "there could scarcely be any prevention of your man's selling his securities, except by the closing of the Wall Street Security Exchange — and that, I gather from the general situation as you describe it, would in itself give a shock severe enough to cause the disaster that you are trying to avoid."

And he fitted another Russian cigarette into his holder.

I sat forward suddenly, and buried my head in my hands in a final gesture of despair.

There was far too much against me in this thing; in fact, the entire logic of the situation. And I could also see, by their respectful but unresponsive silence — I could see only too well that, with the exception of one man, my story was not credited here, or if it were, that there was no real sensing of the danger.

They sat silent, watching me pityingly and understandingly. Extreme nervous eccentricities of manner or even nervous break-

downs were not unknown among them, of course. I gave up finally. I saw that I was done.

"If these do not believe it," I said inwardly — "these emotionally unemployed — how long would it take me to persuade other more slowly moving beliefs into action? It is hopeless!" I said to myself. "Hopeless! Even if any action were really possible," I told myself finally.

I gave a groan and got up.

"I am through," I said. "To-morrow we shall see what we shall see."

The man with the military beard laughed with full assurance.

"Don't worry," he said, striking me reassuringly upon the back. "You have been imposed upon, I know. I have seen it too many times. You are overwrought. Go home and go to bed."

I went out without answering him, and passed, angry and despondent, through the exhaustion of a city summer evening to my own rooms. My physical condition showed me I could do no more.

I knew now that in any case Red Friday

was inevitable. I passed it all over in my mind that night, between my broken bits of sleep—the plot of debt, the subtlety and indirection of the whole movement.

“It is so indefinite, so intangible in its essence,” I told myself. “What could resist it? About what tangible material thing could any practicable defense gather and crystallize?”

There was nothing then to do but wait in fear upon that inevitable to-morrow.



## XVII

AND now, having come to Red Friday at last, I shall scarcely take your time to do more than recapitulate in broad outlines, and give briefly my own personal impressions of that great matter, so recent, which since the event so many skilled writers in finance have done little else but explain.

Plangonev's plans were here, as in all things, well laid. The blow, it will be remembered, could scarcely have fallen upon a security market less prepared. A somnolent August morning in the mid-vacation period held the financial center of the country in a dullness augmented by the great physical exhaustion following the extreme heat of the two days before. It was a full half hour after its opening that the market grasped the danger that was upon it.

Plangonev, of course, in this move, as in all else, did not appear. Taking a leaf, it seems, from the book—the customary prac-

tices of Black—which, of course, he had studied and by this time knew well, the Russian divided his selling between a large number of brokers, each one of whom was ignorant of the other, and indeed of the real identity of the seller. So the selling in any one broker's hands—though large—was not sufficiently large to indicate the purpose which was behind it.

On the other hand, in the aggregate it was enormous—so great, in fact, that it could not be doubted that some huge agency was selling, both directly, it was thought, and upon a short account. And by eleven o'clock even many of the brokers who were selling would have gladly stopped, for they could not now help but see what was coming. They could not withdraw from the transaction, however, being now greatly concerned to protect their principal from loss by the failure of other brokers, and being anxious to secure for him as much as they could for his securities. The Government Railroad Sixes—against which especially the drive had been made—fell straight from the lower 90's to 70, and wavered there, supported in some hurried degree by the

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banks, until, upon their breaking 70, it was seen that another sheer decline was inevitable. Then the Security Exchange, the established stock market upon Wall Street, suspended operations.


Upon this the secret seller promptly continued his selling in the Consolidated Exchange, and when that also closed, switched his operations into the shrieking street market of the curb. It was not now, of course, one man's selling, it was a city's.

By one o'clock it was claimed that some order, with the closing of the two main markets, was about to be established. But at quarter past one it was announced that not one but three of the leading banks had gone. The greatest and strongest, of course, still stood outwardly firm. But there was great concern for the credit activities of the afternoon.

Meanwhile the outcries upon the curb mounted higher and higher. The hard-faced younger men in the street stood howling and working their faces and their fingers in frantic signals to the windows in the dingy blocks above them, in a mad frenzy of nervous ex-

citement. But by one-forty-five this clamor too was hoarsening to its close. The Government Railroad Sixes were last at 52, with now no bidders. There was scarcely a broker in New York solvent—unless the sellers for Plangonev; and these in many cases retired to their rooms and barricaded themselves, afraid of the violence of the frenzied well-dressed men, the other members of their profession, who were about their doorways denouncing them as traitors to their country.

For it was a nation that was selling now—not one man or one interest or one city. The debt of four years, held up for months now with bated breath by the coöperation of the whole financial structure of a nation, now crashed down and carried all credit with it. And when, before three o'clock, it was officially stated that the greatest of all the banks in the country were going one after another, it was seen by every casual observer that without a miracle intervening the end of capital had come and that the country was financially paralyzed. For it was not these banks alone that would be involved, but their correspondents all over the country; they were gone, all



the banks, quite certainly, with the utter collapse in salable value of the securities, of every kind—governmental as well as private—which since the war has come to form directly or indirectly such a great proportion of their assets. Capital in America was gone, exactly as Plangonev had planned, and with it, without doubt, capitalism.

I, myself, unfamiliar as I was with either the operations of the financial district or the district itself, could not resist going down into the section and joining the crowd, which, gathering from all over the city, filled the narrow confines of Wall Street to its edges and spilled over into a great pool on Broad Street.

There were, of course, many interesting, striking and melancholy scenes in the crowd, among the tens of thousands who were drawn that day into the district by curiosity or alarm—threats, violent complaints, and even suicide of individuals stricken and ruined by the disaster. But curiously enough—I could not, of course, but think of this—in all that Red Friday of Plangonev there were very few demonstrations by socialists. It was simply that the formula of Marx had worked itself out to its

end. Capitalism was dead, and now socialism, or government control, or general anarchy—whatever was upon us—must come by mere default.

I saw few socialists, yet there were some. I do recall some few red insignia upon the influx of folk that came later in the day out of the East Side of New York. They arrived, the foreigners of the East Side at first in small numbers, then in greater and greater crowds. As the hours went on they came for the first time in their lives under the high empty arches of the huge bridge whose shadows had marked the unpassed outer boundaries of this section—not more than a short mile away, but more unfamiliar to most of them, both physically and mentally, than the deep interior of Russia.

I will recall one singular scene, as the day passed toward twilight. For I was still there, resolved, in spite of exceeding weariness, to witness the whole drama.

It was on Pine Street, that narrow lane in that stone maze—on Pine Street, not very far from Nassau. An old woman, apparently, I should say from her dress, a scrubwoman from

some office building—starting perhaps to her night of ugly toil—was passing east, clutching in her right hand a document which was quite clearly a security of some kind. I thought from its color and design that it was one of the ill-fated Railroad Sixes.

As I saw her a curious crowd from the East Side came peering down the street in her direction—one or two, possibly, with red ribbons in their buttonholes, but not more. They were coming, singing—for the street was now well emptied and they were young and full of life—singing one of those latest airs, which were being pounded out upon the motion-picture-show pianos; that one universal language of joy in cosmopolitan New York. And as they came along I saw the woman stop their leader, and ask, strangely enough, for the location of the United States sub-treasury building. I stopped myself to get some understanding of the queer scene.

They were almost as unfamiliar as she was with the district, but with the avidity of young city dwellers at once perceived an opportunity for sport, with one whose actions so clearly promised it.

"What do you want it for?" asked the black-haired leader.

"I went and bought this bond from off the Government," she answered, with a slight Irish accent. "They sold it to me. I am going in now and make them pay for it, so I am."

A howl of laughter greeted this—soon hushed by the leader.

"Why wouldn't they pay me then?" she asked. "Don't they owe it to me?"

"Sure. Sure they will," said one, "if you only ask them." And gathering the necessary information from me, they led her the short way to the iron fence rear of the old gray building.

"There it is, mother," they told her. "Go right in. Call them out." And they started urging her, as she fumbled at the iron railing.

"Call a policeman," advised one of them. "They owe you money. They lock you out. Call a cop. He'll make them let you in."

"Sure. That's right," said a second man with glasses and thick lips.

And seeing me following and threatening to end their enjoyment of this grotesque by-play, they left her throwing herself against the



fence with hysterical exclamations, and went on laughing, and whistling that most recent song from the motion-picture piano, seeking some new excitement.

It was with great difficulty that finally, with the aid of a policeman, I convinced the woman of the futility of her actions. And when I had, exhausted and disgusted I gave up my wandering like a futile disembodied spirit about the place, and decided to start up toward my own dwelling, buying the black-faced evening papers as I went.

I could see from their headlines what they recognized to have happened. In spite of the studied attempt of the more conservative journals to disguise it, the nation was paralyzed. There was not a bank in the country that was really solvent, and it was clear that the morning was expected to witness scenes much worse than those of that first day. The beginning of the end was at hand; the savage impulse of hunger but a few days off, and the prompt opening of that endless reign of terror, which I knew all too well that Plangonev, smiling in his lodging, would now be calculating upon and in every way promoting.

I could see, too — or thought I could — that his newspapers of the proletariat were not unprepared for some change. “Shall there be civil war?” inquired the leading editorial of one — prepared no doubt, days before — in which the writer, with his usual adroitness, gave solemn warning to the farmers of the Anti-Confiscation League against initiating violence in the United States.

“Violence. No,” he concluded; “if anyone should tell you this, be sure he is an emissary of capital and an enemy of the people. There will be no violence — unless the farmers force it. And this, of course, our American farmers will not do. They are far too wise, too sympathetic with the people.”

Here was clearly someone who was forewarned of coming events, I thought, and, smiling to himself, with his tongue in his teeth, already starting to shift away from himself the blame for an event not yet transpired, but which he expected as certainly as the next sunrise.

In the news columns there was most evident reason for his expectations. “Universal Bankruptcy!” shrieked the headlines. The more

radical heads of the labor world and the Farmers League were out at once with fiery interviews. And already in hell's kitchen—the West Side tenement section of the rougher and more belligerent laboring population of New York—there were starting up disturbances against the police. Plangonev's plans were, as usual, coming at just the proper time to fruitage. The formula of Marx had come to its inevitable conclusion in America; and now, as well, the end of capitalism was to pass at once into an equally inevitable violence. And here in the press we heard the preliminary twitterings, like the outcries of birds in the blue-black column preceding a great thunderstorm.

I gave a groan of helplessness and fear and guilt when I beheld our handiwork, the sinister success of our cherished plot of debt.

I was pushing away the journal that I was reading when by chance a page was turned, and I saw, buried in other news and as yet without details, the first story of the death of Plangonev at the hands of Charlotte Black.

## XVIII

I CAN reconstruct it almost exactly, from the testimony of the trial and my knowledge of the actors and the scene—this terrible, fortunate and never-to-be-forgotten termination of that conflict, that duel between two utterly hostile creatures, that final stalking down of the strong by the weak.

At the end of the afternoon Plangonev, buoyant with the utter success of Red Friday, turned his mind, not unnaturally, with anticipation and relief to that most beautiful woman, to whom he had promised himself he would repair, gratifying himself by the sight at least of one of the immediate, tangible, personal fruits of his victory. Satisfaction in living, as he often had said to me, cannot be entirely mental, even to a thinker; nor can we expect it to be in a normal, human life.

So then, leaving the slums and passing alone on foot through the desolate street of the great bourgeois, he stood at the front entrance of

the house of Stephen Black. He rang the bell, and the dour-faced doorman, with a hesitation which Plangonev himself must have noted, let him in—let him in, and announced his coming to Miss Black.

The young woman came out then through the silent house, so the doorman testified, white as a statue and just as calm.

“My father,” she announced, standing in the doorway, “you may be surprised to know, died this morning.”

It was indeed a surprise to Plangonev. To my knowledge he had expected Stephen Black to live longer—until he could force the residue of his property from him for his freedom fund, by the power, that unpleasant power given him by Black’s disease of fear. He stood, uncertain, gazing at her and her hard calmness.

“Yes,” she repeated; “he died at ten o’clock.”

And at that, she testified at her hearing, he looked round apparently to assure himself they were alone.

“Oh, no,” she said—purposely, of course, misinterpreting his movement—“please! I

cannot have you go now. We have too much to say to each other—now. Now, especially, I must know where I stand!”

He watched her, she said, puzzled apparently by her hardness and self interest—which yet, of course, as she knew, fitted in so exactly with his theory of her motives, and those of bourgeois women as a class.

And then she asked him about Wall Street—for even into that house and on that day the noise of Red Friday had penetrated. She had heard the hoarse-voiced cries of the sellers of the extras calling in the side streets since quite early in the morning—before her father died and even while he lay dying.

“It has come,” she said, “at last, as you expected, your day of Marx?”

And he told her in ten words of his triumph.

“You were wise then,” she said, “were you not, to rid yourself of the bonds and retain so much of the money for us?” And at that apparently naïve identification of herself with him Plangonev gave a cynic’s smile—more at ease as, of course, she intended.

“But come,” she said in apparent haste, like a woman fleeing a physical disaster, “I have

a number of questions I must ask you. Let us go where we will be away from the servants. Though," she added, "nearly everyone, after this morning, is now asleep—even the doctor."

He watched her, still studying her, but now evidently sure. What else could he gather from that but complete surrender, especially with his premises, his estimate of women?

"We will best go up," she said, "I think, into the museum." And she led the way through the muted corridor, over the almost uncanny silence of the deep-piled carpet on the floors past the dark tapestries, the great vases in the dusky corners and the great and gloomy paintings on the wall.

She went ahead of him, dressed in black, it seems, but her wonderful face and hands the whiter for it—a beauty which made a festival of mourning. And in the black lace at her throat one great rose-flashing diamond. And always with the clumsy automatic revolver dragging on the lace at the side of her skirt.

And so they went, without speaking, up the side stairway of the dark house, and came at last into the high, carved-ceilinged museum, that priceless room of cadaverous Italian fig-

ure paintings; of carved fauns and satyrs upon stone pedestals; of costly, faded, rose-pink textures against dark woods—the rug of the Six Hunters on the floor, and on the wall the great Brillaux hawking tapestry of the killing of the white heron by the falcon, set in studied contrast against the dark, carved walls.

“Sit down,” she said, seating herself in one of the great black chairs below the tapestry, and indicating to him another a little ways across, half facing her, against the adjoining wall.

And he, thinking naturally—according to his estimate of her class—that she wished to complete her bargain for herself, sat down, lighting his gaze upon her beauty, waiting philosophically for her to begin.

After all, even with Stephen Black dead, his position was not bad, as he must have seen it, from the financial angle: If she had the right of refusal of that remaining wealth of her father to him, he had the same right against her. She could not use that fortune if he saw fit to bring about its confiscation by the state, according to already existing law. So they were in the position, in a way, of two




suspicious heirs, each with one key required for the full combination for opening a safe-deposit box. And so he might feel reasonably sure, according to his interpretation of her psychology, that both she and the remaining money would eventually be his.

He sat down, watching and appraising her. She might be moved, he assumed, by the double disaster of the day and by thoughts of her future. But underneath, he saw, she was as hard and resistant as she was beautiful.

It was hot—close, after the continued hot weather, even in that great protected room. The windows were open upon the street. And across, from Central Park—as all could through the whole city that day—they heard the raucous cries of the extra newsboys, calling out the end of the world. Charlotte Black shuddered—no mere acting, after that morning!

“Tell me,” she said quickly, and there was real poignancy in her voice, “what has happened. What you did to-day upon the Street.”

And, smiling, thinking perhaps how many times she might have asked the same question of her father in days gone by, he brought out



the points of attack and collapse in Red Friday. Exultant, urged on as well by the not unhuman stimulus of the excitement and deep attention of a beautiful woman—for whom he would eventually reach out his hand—he went, under her skilled guidance, into every detail; she, of course—as we saw later—storing it away in that remarkable memory of hers, an inheritance no doubt from her father.

“You were wise,” she said, with her flattering appeal to him again, “to sell and hold what you did for us. I do not believe my father himself could have done better.”

“It was nothing,” said Plangonev, touched, no doubt, by the flattery, but not showing it. “I followed merely a necessary law.”

He sat now, sure of her, more at ease and less upon his guard, a figure rough, uncouth, coarsely dressed, a spectacle not unlike a stained and muddy officer of an invading force taking his sprawling ease in a house—the palace of some highbred woman of the enemy. She, white in her black dress, sat underneath the great hawking tapestry; he in his dingy clothes, beneath and a little to one side of the meager, crooked figures of a crucifixion in

a black frame, painted in the early Italian style. And then once more from outside the woman heard the cries of the hoarse newsboys in the distance—and went on.

“But now,” she asked quickly, “now that your day has come—what next?”

“Who can say?” returned Plangonev, at his smiling ease. “Who is there that should know?”

And she waited, knowing now from his whole attitude that he would talk—as men will, at their ease after a victory, to a woman; talk to themselves, purge their souls of pride and vanity to a listening woman.

“Who can say?” said Plangonev. “It is chemistry, that is all!”

“Chemistry!” she repeated.

“Why not?” he said. “That is the foundation, is it not? All we know of ourselves, of life—you—I—all men!” And he went on, outlining again that fundamental fatalistic faith of his.

“What is human life? A few plain, basic chemical impulses. Hunger. The attraction between you and me—the sexes!” he said, and smiled a smile of most unpleasing signifi-

cance at her, while she sat still, only that her right hand moved involuntarily the slight fraction of an inch toward her pocket beneath the lace at her right side.

"That—" he said, drawn on and away from considering her, she saw, by his theory and his desire of self explanation—"that is simple and well-known. What is organic life, either as it comes rising first from the sea water, or yet as it flows to-day through cities and societies? A few simple chemical and electrical impulses with known laws!

"But beyond this," he continued, "society at large is yet too complex for our present knowledge to be foreseen exactly in all details. A complicated series of reactions in a great organic compound, millions of possible combinations as in—let us say—a modern high explosive.

"Some general rules, certainly, we know," he stated, "as in the law of Marx—some general, unavoidable laws in the chemistry of nations—that is all!"

"But you know—you must know—something of the future now," she insisted.

"Some general reactions, yes, which we

must provoke as we can—as we have in this already. As we have known, for instance, what would happen here in the past under the law of Marx, so now we know somewhat at least of what shall happen next, by experiments, by watching what occurs in Russia, in Germany, in the old and new revolutions in France.

“Violence!” exclaimed the woman. “Anarchy!”

“Why not?” he said. “For a time. It has always come. It is inevitable. Meanwhile, we make the new foundations. We sweep away the rubbish.”

“The rubbish!” she cried out.

“We recognize at last what we are—the real rules of living, the chemistry of human life and motive,” he cried, his eye sparkling again at his old theory. “We see what it is. The rest we sweep away. Your so-called spiritual life. Your bourgeois superstitions, that smear and cloud the human intellect. Your bourgeois family that preys upon the worker for its young and its captive women; your bourgeois state that kills the worker for new markets; your bourgeois priest who calls

to the worker to be peacefully killed for the God of the holy ten per cent."

And at that, partly no doubt to cover up her real emotions, the woman gave a little laugh.

"You laugh," he said quickly, with an almost threatening look.

"Yes," she answered, "at myself! At women and your bourgeois emotions—your amusing emotions of property, which you now dismiss entirely. What will become of us when they have gone?" she asked, mocking him, with lips that were very dry, she testified.

"You will get used to it, my dear," he answered, smiling now.

"No superstitions," she said. "No God, no country, no family," she went on, rallying him. "Merely internationalism and a general state of chemistry. It sounds amusing—exciting even. But it will be a new place for mere woman, this new world of yours, without the old emotions."

"We shall see," he answered, smiling in return. "They will no longer need them, perhaps, under the new freedom. They can get along without the sweet stickiness of their old emotional surroundings."

"No family," she said, challenging him now, "and no marriage?"

"For the present, yes," he said, shifting his ground a little; "if they wish it!" And he smiled a smile, she said, more unpleasant than his frowning.

"And yet," she went on, avoiding his glance again, apparently thinking; "this is not Russia. This is the United States."

"Have I said otherwise?" he asked her, amused.

"How can you be sure," she persisted, "that your chemistry—your expectation of violence and anarchy—must come here."

"It will be the same," he said, with confident amusement—"the same, only much more!"

"Why?" she asked directly.

"It all depends—this violence—upon the bourgeois, their resistance of us. The bourgeois, they will wish, certainly, some violence at least!" he said and laughed. "As in Russia. The capitalistic system is much deeper rooted here and the emotions of property. So much more then they will resist. The agrarians—this Anti-Confiscation League of the agrarians and their friends—what were the

Russian peasants to these? Bah! Driven cattle. No," he said, with triumphant cruelty, "the chemicals here are stronger and newer. The reaction will be more. Very soon we shall hear the machine guns pop here also. And the looters of the bourgeois stealings! It is inevitable."

"Of itself?" she cried. "Will it come by nothing but its own force?"

For she was now, of course, close to what she must know.

"It should be assisted now, no doubt—the natural course of events—by the mixing of the chemicals, let us say," he told her, "as it has been in the past."

And she led him by her skillful flattery through the whole tale which she had only dimly guessed when he had talked before.

"A few *agents provocateurs* here and there, no doubt," he said, "as in the past." And he named them, with place and time; the past agents and those for the future. "A few of these conscious," he said; "but mostly blundering fools, who acted for us without knowledge!" And he told her, laughing, also of these. And she saw now—she thought she



saw, as she had hoped — that there were documents, incriminating documents, which he might have with him.

And then for the third time she heard from the outside that hoarse cry again, louder still in that silent room — that cry of some other newsboy, passing for some unknown reason of his own down or across the desolate street of the great bourgeois. And again she shuddered. For it reminded her once more, of course, of the same cries through the window in the death room that morning — those cries of the end of the world which had come into the last restless, fearful dreams of Stephen Black, helping, no doubt, to hurry him to death.

She shuddered, for she saw the scene again. But then, too, she heard again the promise she had made herself articulately then — that this man, this murderer of her father, should not go on his triumphant way forever! And so now she started on that final inquiry of hers.

“You can say this,” she said, facing him, “to a woman!”

“What?”

"About the future. What you and these others, with your fund of freedom, are about to do."

"No doubt," said Plangonev, studying her.

"But would you say it to a man who knows about such things? How could you prove it? How can you show it—to convince me? Or do you dare?" she cried, and sat waiting now—her very heartbeat waiting—for his answer.

"Why not?" said Plangonev imperturbably. "Why not now?" And he took from a soiled and greasy leather pocket portfolio that first paper—that Document No. 1 of the trial, that list of the fellow conspirators. "Why not now?" he said, and reaching forward held it toward her.

"May I see it?" she asked, and took it daintily, deftly avoiding the touch of Plangonev's fingers. And read it carefully and laid it on her lap. "Is that all?" she asked.

Then, one by one, he passed the others over—the list of larger payments from the freedom fund, the help in election districts, the advertising in certain papers. She read them and let them lie upon her lap. But now, when

she had them all, her right hand stole and lay continuously in that pocket, within the lace of her skirt.

She had now all she could have hoped for, all she had thought to get in past weeks. And even now it might not be too late — though her father was now dead — to help the country as a whole. There must be some authority somewhere still, she assumed, where the presentation of such proof as she could now give might arrest the general disaster which was now so imminent. But the question for her at the minute was how to keep what she had now acquired; to bring away those papers and herself! She had deliberately lured him here for this — using what powers of attraction she had for him, as she testified later. Now she must extricate herself, by guile if possible, by violence if necessary; though, so she always protested, she always hoped to do this without killing him.

He may have sensed something of this in her manner, for now he looked at her, reaching out his hand.

“Now having read them,” he said, “you will return them, please!”

"Not yet," she answered him at once. "Not till you and I have talked."

"Talked!" he said more loudly. "Upon what?"

"Upon ourselves," she answered. "Our plans for what must come!"

Then he sat back smiling, but watching her now narrowly.

"Very good," he said, "concerning what?"

"I must have some rights, some powers, myself," she said, "in this, if everything, as it seems to me, if the world, is to become a matter of force and chemistry from now on, as you say it is."

"Have you not enough power now?" he asked, watching.

"What?"

"You have still," he argued, "the control of the money we shall have—the fund of your father's," he said, changing suddenly the ending of his speech.

"How much control," she returned, "when you once take it in your hands?"

"But this," he said, shifting ground, "which you now have, what use would these papers be in the new conditions? What use in any

conditions," he said, now rising — "except to do me damage — now!

"Give them to me!" he demanded sharply, and moved toward her.

"No!" she said, and rose herself, stepping backward, holding the papers, womanlike, with one hand behind her; and with the other bringing out at last the hidden pistol.

"So," said Plangonev, speaking slowly, eyeing her; "that is it!"

"That is it," she said after him, and started back another step, holding her weapon somewhat awkwardly before her.

And at that, seeing her, Plangonev laughed and jumped, not toward her or away from her, but to one side; to the corner of the room near where she had first placed herself, the corner where the electric call bells were set into the wall.

She had made in her excitement a false move, she saw. She had not planned for outside aid. It was scarcely an enterprise to be trusted to the chatter of servants. She had taken the chance deliberately, with her eyes open, reflecting naturally on the conditions of the time which made such a step necessary for

a woman, but still, with her native independence and a woman's natural reticence concerning her action, deciding to go her own way and keep her own counsel. And now she wondered when she saw him between her and outside assistance—when she stood alone with him on that empty floor, in that great high silent room, full of the inanimate carved and painted witnesses upon the standards and on the walls—now indeed the question came sharply to her whether she had not been overconfident in herself.

“So!” said Plangonev, watching her narrowly from across the room. “Treachery!” And he laughed.

He would not kill her, of course, she told herself. But that, of course, was not now—seeing his face—what she feared. She was not a woman to him now, she saw; she was an enemy. Or rather—much worse—she was both a woman and an enemy.

She stood facing him with her unaccustomed weapon; still, except for her obvious awkwardness, outwardly calm and entirely confident of herself.

“No,” she said, and smiled back. “Not

treachery! The era of chemistry when each one fights for himself."

And again the Russian laughed.

"An apt pupil," he said. "But what," he asked, "what do you fight for? To what end?"

"Against you," she said, "and your inevitable laws of society. Your new chemical freedom?"

"Against the laws of nature, no doubt," he said. "The certainty of the time."

"Possibly," she answered.

"You do not care then," he returned, smiling still, "for our new freedom?"

"No," she answered him sharply, "not so far as I have seen it. The new freedom, the scientific freedom, is much too free for me, I fear. And also not particularly attractive," she said, with light scorn—"this natural freedom of the laws of chemistry working in men such as you."

"It amuses you, it would seem," said Plangonev briefly—"my definition."

"Why not?" she returned, mocking him. "According to your theory, I myself am that amusing thing, a woman, a compound," she

proceeded, paraphrasing him, "of the bourgeois emotions, of the emotions of property, of the exploded beliefs in home and country and religion."


"So it seems," he said, now in his turn probably stimulating her to talk.

"Yes," she said, facing him, remembering all the happenings of that day, "I am all that — all you have described me. I had no idea before what I actually was."

He let down his hands now, leaning against the wall, apparently in surrender, as a stimulus to her rising confidence.

"Yes," she said with bitter voice and spirit; "it would have amused you greatly to see it, I know, my emotion for my father when he died this morning. A hard man, I know, to many people, but still to me my father. Curious, was it not, and most illogical, my plan to defend him from you — by what powers of interesting you I had — until finally he could die, at least, in peace from you? Yet I did it finally," she cried with bitter triumph, "what I first planned to do."

Plangonev stood silent, passive, only hoping for her to go on.





"His death," she said harshly again, "hurried by you, and my watching it helpless, are all most amusing examples of a woman's feelings. But after that, still more amusing—I would not have believed it of myself—I felt again that last extreme bourgeois emotion, that love of country, that you social chemists all so logically detest. Yes, there was even some traditional religion in it, I think, in my plan to best you. I would not have believed it of myself.

"I mean it," she said briefly; "I am not jesting. I would not have believed it of myself three years ago. I would have laughed as heartily as you—as I did laugh often when you told me—at the thought that I myself was such a creature as you described, a compound of your exploded bourgeois emotions, or that I could have done what I have done to you, used—what shall we say?—my more primitive powers of attraction, till I have finally trapped and captured you!"

It must have been at that time, she thinks, when she grew most confident and most excited, that he must in some way have taken from that small standard beside him that

weapon, that costly ancient missal with metal edges, and put it behind his back.

"And now," he said, still keeping her talking—"now that you have me as you wish, what next?"

"What do you mean by that?" she returned quickly.

"What have I done? To what authority will you take me?"

That question puzzled her, and dispirited her and set her thinking, as he expected. Her knowledge of what she could do with her evidence was limited at best, and now, after the great change of that day, she was much less confident.

"I can take it to any of the authorities, of course," she answered vaguely, but in a sure and steady voice.

And he laughed.

"On what ground? To what authorities?"

"To the next police station, if necessary," she answered him at random.

And at that he laughed louder than ever, and as he laughed he threw the little metal-edged book at her, and as it struck her, throwing down her arm and knocking out

of her hand the weapon, he hurled himself after it.

He was slower, of course, than a younger man. That was what probably saved her—that and the rug of the Six Hunters. She stooped, a little dazed, to catch up her weapon, and as she did so, his foot caught upon the edge of the rug, and she saw his face, as he came falling toward her, in an unclean agony of haste—the face of a man in absolute savagery and hate, falling forward and clutching her about the knees.

She had now regained her weapon, her papers flying from her other hand. But she must still turn it toward him. This she managed to do—in time. And it was then that the first shot was fired, piercing the Russian's right arm.

This, of course, made them more equal in strength for the continuing struggle. For it must continue, naturally, by the necessity of either side. He fell, she said—went down with the impact of the shot—but with the endurance of his kind was on his knees again, his strength not yet much impaired. And she herself, sickened, revolted, in a numbness of ex-

citement and fear, recoiled, but still fortunately held her weapon, which now he with his left hand was struggling to take from her.

And so mutely the two struggled—those two most opposite creatures, those two personifications of different ideals and civilization, a woman of our time and a Bolshevik—struggled on in that great dark room with the strangely mingled symbols of past civilizations and ideals round them, the fauns and satyrs on the standards; the Christs and saints and pain-crooked martyrs upon the wall; and overshadowing all the huge tapestry of the hunting nobles.

She gave herself up almost for lost. She could not free her elbow from his grasp; but then by a great final effort she transferred her weapon to her other hand. And then at last the second shot was fired, and Plangonev sank finally before her, a dingy figure, stretched out at last, face downward, upon the new and brighter stain, which grew against the old and faded pink of the priceless rug of the Six Hunters.

She stood panting and listening. No one had heard them apparently, the sound of the

shots dying within that isolated room and floor. She stood there for a moment, gathering back her strength; and then dragged herself, in her torn clothing, to the hallway—to the nearest telephone in the house—shutting shudderingly behind her as she went the great door into that high room with that coarse dead figure upon its floor, and the congregations of silent witnesses upon its standards and its walls.

She took the telephone in her shaking hands, and gave—half automatically in her weakness—the call for the police.

“I must report to you,” the officer at the police desk heard, listening, “I have killed a man—a robber. A robber of the world!” he thought he heard her say, her voice rising. “The man who has destroyed the United States.”

And following that he heard a heavy fall, and then silence over the wire.

There behind her, in that house of fear, by a strange irony of fate, the two prime movers in the plot of debt lay dead together under the same roof, each from the unseen powers that he had himself evoked.

## XIX

IT has been deemed strange, this sharp final turning in the plot of debt. The trap was set, the secret pitfall dug, the game all driven; there seemed no reasonable possibility of escape, when suddenly on the verge of their destruction, a nation and a civilization were released by the weak hand of a woman.

All this seems strange. And yet, what other impulse, I ask, could possibly have accomplished it? There was but one thing concededly that did or could release the nation from its danger—a sudden general emotional impulse; a great appeal to the traditional emotions of the people, driving them to action. For every one well knows to-day it was just this outburst of Plangonev's detested and, I believe, always feared emotions of property—the emotions of family and nation and religion—which finally overthrew the Russian and his plans. And where, may I ask, do these emotions center if not on woman?

To be explicit and particular, what other story but that of Charlotte Black's action would have arrested the attention of the American press on a day like Red Friday; and carried across the country on even terms with the story of the disaster, at one and the same time, an explanation, a warning and an emotional impulse to opposition? An American woman, rich, beautiful, finely reared, had killed an anarchist, a secret Russian agent, in her home, defending at once her dying father, her person and her country. And this story, we may be sure, lost nothing in the hands of the American journalist, trained through his lifetime for just such a story's telling.

A general shudder passed across the country. Man and wife and family grew closer to one, in farm and city, as they locked the door upon their homes that night; the politicians gave out oratorical interviews; ministers preached warnings; and the very newspapers upon which Plangonev most depended for his change—the press of the proletariat—ran up the national flag at the head of their columns and kept it there for days and days. The whole country was swept, in fact, by a wildfire

of old racial, tribal, national emotions. It was the desire of all to get together in any way possible and avoid the threatened chaos — the certain anarchy that had ruled in Russia.

What other agency, I ask, could have at once awakened the necessary impetus through such action, but the story of an American woman, attacked and defending herself in her own home? And when there was added to this the documents secured by Charlotte Black, proving the secret conspiracy of this foreigner, a Russian Bolshevik, hated and feared as this very name had grown to be by any property holder or individualist across the world — the reaction to old conditions in the supremely individualistic United States, no matter what sacrifices must now be made to resecure them, was certain. The country threw itself at once into the arms of the farmers of the Anti-Confiscation League, who took on, considering the circumstances of the past, almost too stern a power. The labor leaders, even the most extreme, counseled now the greatest moderation and conciliation; the most rigid bureaucrats at Washington were willing to concede possible faults in governmental operation; and by a



general consent and applause the present universal moratorium and state of concessions on all sides were established, which are now expected to bring about before long a modified return to old conditions in the United States. And, of course, all this has been greatly aided by the scurrying and scuttling back, and eager assistance in reestablishing old conditions, of those who have reason to fear that they will be implicated directly, or indirectly with the plot of debt, the trials for which are now following the merely formal trial and triumphant acquittal of Charlotte Black.

She, of course, has become now almost a national heroine, with a general idealization of her character and motives, to which, however much I may subscribe as being typical of the value of woman's deepest instincts, I still must somewhat qualify in regard to her personally. However, I will concede, my motives are perhaps mixed, and I should not say this. It was Charlotte Black's testimony indeed that absolved and released me personally from the charge of conspiracy in the plot of debt, yet on grounds most unflattering to me.

"The Reverend Todd was a poor dupe of

Plangonev's," she testified, "emotionally misled. Merely a poor pacifist. He would have willingly assisted me in my last fight against the Russian, I know—if I had wanted him! But what woman would go for aid to a pacifist, after their pronouncements on the women of Belgium?"

It has seemed to me, personally, that this was unnecessarily severe. Yet because of it, and from entire lack of evidence of any overt practical act of mine in the matter, I was at last released, while others, far less at the center of the movement, have been condemned, or are still in the hazard of their life of liberty, for treason.

I am away from it all, of course, to a very large extent now. But occasionally I drop in on my friends the amateur saviors and discuss the affairs of the day. Poor people! The changes that have come upon them—on both sides, as it were, from the loss of their incomes, and from the reluctance of the time to longer hear them—have thrown them more and more in upon themselves. They sit quite often now all day, and talk and talk in the now somewhat shabby room of the Man With the Spats.

I was in there no later than this afternoon; and by chance I found again the young observer with horn glasses, who had visited Russia, talking of the Russian mir.

"There will be a revolt," he said, "before many years; a revolt from this wild ridiculous recrudescence of the bourgeois emotions we see all round us now. And when that time comes we must not forget the fellowship, the mutual aid, the germs of a new communism contained for us in the mir of Russia."

And at that I sprang up.

"The mir!" I almost shouted. "The mir!" I confess I was very nervous and overwrought. "Communism—socialism—common property new! I am sick to death of hearing it. New," I said; "yes, to the college sophomore in his winter term—new by right of prior discovery; new to the dilettante mind, permanently arrested in a sophomoric stage of growth; new to the newly-read laboring man! And historically the oldest thing on man's earth!

"New!" I said, growing more and more excited. "No; older than Stonehenge, older

than the kitchen middens of Europe, when savage men lived in level equality with their dogs; old as the beginnings of the race!"

No one, strangely enough, seemed to wish to interrupt me as I talked, all being perhaps surprised at my sudden and long-pent outburst. The man with the longish hair looked up at me merely and rolled his head upon his hands—evidently that day with one of his severe headaches. The man with the military beard sat staring in gloomy resolution at the wall. But the plump wife, once so wealthy—of the man with the longish hair, looked up at me from her sewing for the first time that I remembered with approval, her eyes inciting me to go on.

I did so.

"Common property!" I cried. "It was once all common property. Common property in women, common property in children in a general howling tribal pack; common property in a cave dwelling. Common property in herds and crops and lands. Were they any better for it—the women or the children or the crops or the cattle? Or did Western Europe discard this herd life and leave it to

Eastern Europe and the Amazon Valley and the Congo?"

And I saw the Man With the Spats nodding gravely to himself.

"Did or did not man gradually and painfully build up," I demanded, "the other thing—the individualist and the individual property? Is it something to be ashamed of or rejoice in, that gradually in the slow process of time, man required and secured property in the faith of one woman of his own; and by this acquired and insured a property in children of his own; and for these that he held and defended a home of his own, and a tribe, and a nation—yes, and even a belief!"

The young student of the mir stood looking at me wide-eyed, as one hearing blasphemy. But I was excited; I drove right on.

"The emotions of property—the bourgeois standards and impulses!" I cried, warming to my theme. "They are ridiculous, are they not? The self-centered bourgeois home, the Fourth of July orator, the evangelistic howler? They are absurd—yes!" I said. "But when these are gone," I demanded—"what? What then? A general riot of organic chemistry,

with Plangonev's leading? Do you like that more?

"No," I said. "Laugh if you wish to. These much-flouted impulses, these old emotions of ours, are founded on something deep — the traditions and stimuli of the life history of a civilization. They constitute a real impulse at least, a constant, common call to work for and fight for and improve something of your own, and yourself! Something less grandiose, less pretty in the statement, perhaps, but more genuine and driving — much — than the worship of mathematics or chemistry or sociology or the Milky Way, or some one of the ten thousand easy, high-sounding cults of evolution of the late nineteenth century."

And now the wife of the man with the long hair nodded decidedly.

"Oh, Evolution," I almost shouted now, "Evolution, what theories have not been committed in your name! By Germans since 1860 — Nietzsche, Haeckel, Marx — a host of second-hand prophets, of mad tailors, strutting and mouthing in coats made over from the stolen mantle of a giant. Evolution," I said scornfully, "the inevitable law of Marx!

“Inevitable—the law of Marx? Inevitable, yes,” I said. For I had thought deeply on the subject those past few months. “Inevitable for a people who did not value their liberties sufficiently to guard them. Inevitable as the laws of chemistry, working on a costly book, dropped from the hands of a careless servant into a fire; as the laws of gravity dragging at an automobile left standing with brakes unset upon a slope! Inevitable, yes, as all degradation to those who do not care to guard their possessions, as individual liberty always must be guarded. Inevitable, no doubt, to us, in the state of fat and reckless abandon into which this nation came before and after the Great War. Every man for himself, grabbing from the other. Every laborer clutching all he could take and giving back as little as he could. And on the other side, worst of all, the great bourgeois and their fat lawyers, sucking the corporations at every pore; set thick on every great growing business enterprise as plant lice upon a green garden shrub in a rainy June!

“But for that reason,” I inquired, “shall we tear up the garden? Shall we destroy a


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civilization when all its roots are sound, and all it really needs is more care and pruning and spraying?

"But, no!" I said bitterly. "We had to come to this, to the sheer abyss, to the edge of a backward fall of forty centuries before we stopped. If we have stopped!" I said, and checked myself finally and got up.

I saw I had evoked unexpected emotions among my friends, the emotionally unemployed. The Man With the Spats sighed softly and inserted another Russian cigarette in his long holder. The man with the military beard sat silent, staring at the wall, not a word of argument out of him. The young student of the mir still stood staring at me, surprised at my harangue, a singularly innocent, milk-fed look upon his face, I thought, watching him, with his mouth as round as his horn glasses. The man with the longish hair sat upon the lounge, still rolling his head in his long cold hands. But his wife, formerly so unresponsive to me, when I was done suddenly laid down her sewing, and getting up without a word shook me warmly by the hand.

I was abashed, ashamed. After all, who was





I, after what I had done, to come here endeavoring to take away from these poor folks that last bare comfort of their theories?

But then, while I stood embarrassed, as if upon a hinge, the young observer in horn glasses turned and with a sudden straightening of the shoulders, faced me.

"You — are — a — renegade — socialist!" he said slowly, as one pronouncing anathema.

"No," I replied, "I am an individualist. I did not know it, but I am. I am an American — the most extreme individualist of all. For the individualists," I said, "came West, conquering the world. And here we are! The communists remained always in the rear — in the East. If you like them, why not go back there — to Russia?"

And with that, ashamed again of my excess of feeling, I turned abruptly and went out during the general silence. And from there passed home thoughtfully to my lodgings.

"But what a pity it all is," I said to myself. "The difficulty we have all got ourselves into by our pure carelessness and lack of appreciation and care and willingness to build up our liberties when we had them! What a long and

tedious burden was laid upon us by this government waste and debt; and the quarreling and blundering and misunderstandings of different factions—between capital and labor, farm and city. What a pity we could not have foreseen and started to prevent this situation in which we now find ourselves when we might so easily have done so three or four short years ago!”

**THE END**



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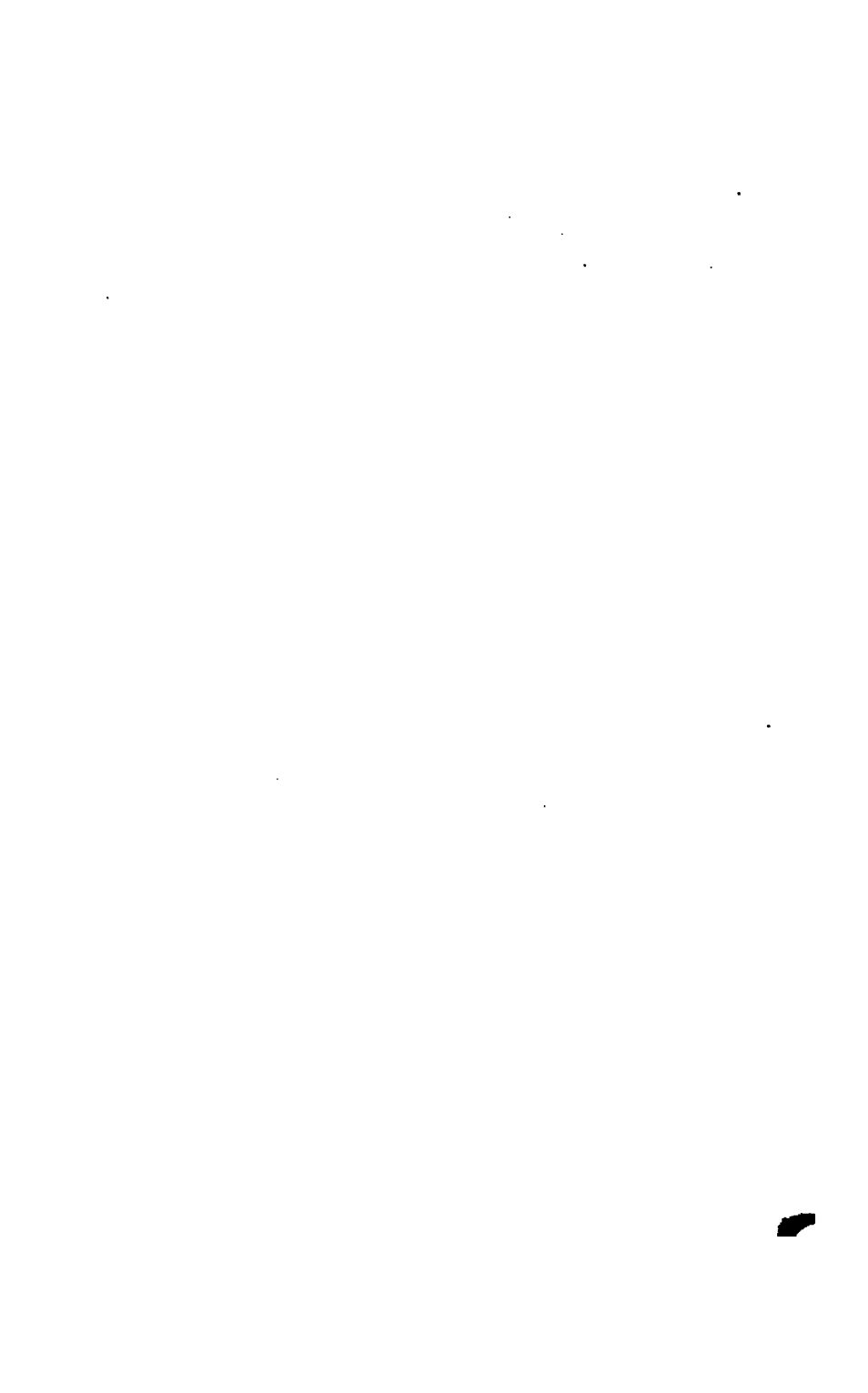
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